THREE NOVELS OF LOVE

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From a drawing by W. M. Berger

BURY HOUSE, JOHN GALSWORTHY'S HOME IN SUSSEX, ENGLAND, WHERE "A MODERN COMEDY" WAS WRITTEN

THREE NOVELS OF LOVE

BY

JOHN GALSWORTHY

VOLUME V

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CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

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BOOK I

THE DARK FLOWER

"Take the flower from my breast, I pray thee;
Take the flower, too, from out my tresses;
And then go hence, for see, the night is fair,
The stars rejoice to watch thee on thy way."

—*From "The Bard of the Dimbovitza."*

PART I

SPRING

I

He walked along Holywell that afternoon of early June with his short gown drooping down his arms, and no cap on his thick dark hair. A youth of middle height, and built as if he had come of two very different strains, one sturdy, the other wiry and light. His face, too, was a curious blend, for, though it was strongly formed, its expression was rather soft and moody. His eyes—dark grey, with a good deal of light in them, and very black lashes—had a way of looking beyond what they saw, so that he did not seem always to be quite present; but his smile was exceedingly swift, uncovering teeth as white as a negro's, and giving his face a peculiar eagerness. People stared at him a little as he passed—since in eighteen hundred and eighty he was before his time in not wearing a cap. Women especially were interested; they perceived that he took no notice of them, seeming rather to be looking into distance, and making combinations in his soul.

Did he know of what he was thinking—did he ever know quite definitely at that time of his life, when things, especially those beyond the immediate horizon, were so curious and interesting?—the things he was going to see and do when he had got through Oxford, where everybody was "awfully decent" to him, and "all right," of course, but not so very interesting.

He was on his way to his tutor's to read an essay on Oliver Cromwell; and under the old wall, which had once hedged in the town, he took out of his pocket a beast. It was a small tortoise, and, with an extreme absorption, he watched it move its little inquiring head, feeling it all the time with his short, broad fingers, as though to discover exactly how it was made. It was mighty hard in the back! No wonder poor old Æschylus felt a bit sick when it fell on his head! The ancients used it to stand the world on—a pagoda world, perhaps, of men and beasts and trees, like that carving on his guardian's Chinese cabinet.

The Chinese made jolly beasts and trees, as if they believed in everything having a soul, and not only being just fit for people to eat or drive or make houses of. If only the Art School would let him model things "on his own," instead of copying and copying—it was just as if they imagined it would be dangerous to let you think out anything for yourself!

He held the tortoise to his waistcoat, and let it crawl, till, noticing that it was gnawing the corner of his essay, he put it back into his pocket. What would his tutor do if he were to know it was there?—cock his head a little to one side, and say: "Ah! there are things, Lennan, not dreamed of in my philosophy!" Yes, there were a good many not dreamed of by "old Stormer," who seemed so awfully afraid of anything that wasn't usual; who seemed always laughing at you, for fear that you should laugh at him. There were lots of people in Oxford like that. It was stupid. You couldn't do anything decent if you were afraid of being laughed at! Mrs. Stormer wasn't like that; she did things because—they came into her head. But then, of course, she was Austrian, not English, and ever so much younger than old Stormer.

And having reached the door of his tutor's house, he rang the bell. . . .

II

When Anna Stormer came into the study she found her husband standing at the window with his head a little on one side—a tall, long-legged figure in clothes of a pleasant tweed, and wearing a low turn-over collar (not common in those days) and a blue silk tie, which she had knitted, strung through a ring. He was humming and gently tapping the window-pane with his well-kept finger-nails. Though celebrated for the amount of work he got through, she never caught him doing any in this house of theirs, chosen because it was more than half a mile away from the College which held the "dear young clowns," as he called them, of whom he was tutor.

He did not turn—it was not, of course, his habit to notice what was not absolutely necessary—but she felt that he was aware of her. She came to the window seat and sat down. He looked round at that, and said: "Ah!"

It was a murmur almost of admiration, not usual from him, since, with the exception of certain portions of the classics, it was hardly his custom to admire. But she knew that she was looking her best sitting there, her really beautiful figure poised, the sun shining on her brown hair, and brightening her deep-set, ice-green eyes under their black lashes. It was sometimes a great comfort to her that she remained so good-looking. It would have been an added vexation indeed to have felt that she ruffled her husband's fastidiousness. Even so, her cheekbones were too high for his taste, symbols of that something in her character which did not go with his—the dash of desperation, of vividness, that lack of a certain English smoothness, which always annoyed him.

"Harold!"—she would never quite flatten her r's—"I want to go to the mountains this year."

The mountains! She had not seen them since that season at San Martino di Castrozza twelve years ago, which had ended in her marrying him.

"Nostalgia!"

"I don't know what that means—I am homesick. Can we go?"

"If you like—why not? But no leading up the Cimone della Pala for *me!*"

She knew what he meant by that. No romance. How splendidly he had led that day! She had almost worshipped him. What blindness! What distortion! Was it really the same man standing there with those bright, doubting eyes, with grey already in his hair? Yes, romance was over! And she sat silent, looking out into the street—that little old street into which she looked day and night. A figure passed out there, came to the door, and rang.

She said softly: "Here is Mark Lennan!"

She felt her husband's eyes rest on her just for a moment, knew that he had turned, heard him murmur: "Ah, the angel clown!" And, quite still, she waited for the door to open. There was the boy, with his blessed dark head, and his shy, gentle gravity, and his essay in his hand.

"Well, Lennan, and how's old Noll? Hypocrite of genius, eh? Draw up; let's get him over!"

Motionless, from her seat at the window, she watched those two figures at the table—the boy reading in his queer, velvety bass voice; her husband leaning back with the tips of his fingers pressed together, his head a little on one side, and that faint, satiric smile which never reached his eyes. Yes, he was dozing, falling asleep; and the boy, not seeing, was going on. Then he came to the end and glanced up. What eyes he had! Other boys would have laughed; but he looked almost sorry. She heard him murmur: "I'm awfully sorry, sir."

"Ah, Lennan, you caught me! Fact is, term's fagged me out. We're going to the mountains. Ever been to the mountains? What—never! You should come with us, eh? What do you say, Anna? Don't you think this young man ought to come with us?"

She got up, and stood staring at them both. Had she heard aright?

Then she answered—very gravely:

"Yes; I think he ought."

"Good; we'll get *him* to lead up the Cimone della Pala!"

III

When the boy had said good-bye, and she had watched him out into the street, Anna stood for a moment in the streak of sunlight coming in through the open door, her hands pressed to cheeks which were flaming. Then she shut the door and leaned her forehead against the window-pane, seeing nothing. Her heart beat very fast; she was going over and over again the scene just passed through. This meant so much more than it had seemed to mean. . . .

Though she always had *Heimweh,* and especially at the end of the summer term, this year a different feeling altogether had made her say to her husband: "I want to go to the mountains!"

For twelve years she had longed for the mountains every summer, but had not pleaded for them; this year she had pleaded, but she did not long for them. It was because she had suddenly realised the strange fact that she did not want to leave England, and the reason for it, that she had come and begged to go. Yet why, when it was just to get away from thought of this boy, had she said: "Yes, I think he ought to come!" Ah! but life for her was always a strange pull between the conscientious and the desperate; a queer, vivid, aching business! How long was it now since that day when he first came to lunch, silent and shy, and suddenly smiling as if he were all lighted up within—the day when she had said to her husband afterwards: "Ah, he's an angel!" Not yet a year—the beginning of last October term, in fact. He was different from all the other boys; not that he was a prodigy with untidy hair, ill-fitting clothes, and a clever tongue, but because of something—something—— Ah! well—different; because he was—he; because she longed to take his head between her hands and kiss it. She remembered so well the day that longing first came to her. She was giving him tea, it was quite early in the Easter term; he was stroking her cat, who always went to him, and telling her that he meant to be a sculptor, but that his guardian objected, so that, of course, he could not start till he was of age. The lamp on the table had a rose-coloured shade; he had been rowing—a very cold day—and his face was glowing; generally it was rather

pale. And suddenly he smiled, and said: "It's rotten waiting for things, isn't it?" It was then she had almost stretched out her hands to draw his forehead to her lips. She had thought then that she wanted to kiss him, because it would have been so nice to be his mother—she might just have been his mother, if she had married at sixteen. But she had long known now that she wanted to kiss, not his forehead, but his lips. He was there in her life—a fire in a cold and unaired house; it had even become hard to understand that she could have gone on all these years without him. She had missed him so those six weeks of the Easter vacation, she had revelled so in his three queer little letters, half-shy, half-confidential; kissed them, and worn them in her dress! And in return had written him long, perfectly correct epistles in her still rather quaint English. She had never let him guess her feelings; the idea that he might shocked her inexpressibly. When the summer term began, life seemed to be all made up of thoughts of him. If, ten years ago, her baby had lived, if its cruel death—after her agony—had not killed for good her wish to have another; if for years now she had not been living with the knowledge that she had no warmth to expect, and that love was all over for her; if life in the most beautiful of all old cities had been able to grip her—there would have been forces to check this feeling. But there was nothing in the world to divert the current. And she was so brimful of life, so conscious of vitality running to sheer waste. Sometimes it had been terrific, that feeling within her, of wanting to live—to find outlet for her energy. So many hundreds of lonely walks she had taken during all these years, trying to lose herself in Nature—hurrying alone, running in the woods, over the fields, where people did not come, trying to get rid of that sense of waste, trying once more to feel as she had felt when a girl, with the whole world before her. It was not for nothing that her figure was superb, her hair so bright a brown, her eyes so full of light. She had tried many distractions. Work in the back streets, music, acting, hunting; given them up one after the other; taken to them passionately again. They had served in the past. But this year they had not served. . . . One Sunday, coming from confession unconfessed, she had faced herself. It was wicked. She would have to kill this feeling—must fly from this boy who moved her so! If she did not act quickly, she would be swept away. And then the thought had come: Why not? Life was to be lived—not torpidly dozed through in

this queer cultured place, where age was in the blood! Life was for love—to be enjoyed! And she would be thirty-six next month! It seemed to her already an enormous age. Thirty-six! Soon she would be old, actually old—and never have known passion! The worship, which had made a hero of the distinguished-looking Englishman, twelve years older than herself, who could lead up the Cimone della Pala, had not been passion. It might, perhaps, have become passion if he had so willed. But he was all form, ice, books. Had he a heart at all, had he blood in his veins? Was there any joy of life in this too beautiful city and these people who lived in it—this place where even enthusiasms seemed to be formal and have no wings, where everything was settled and sophisticated as the very chapels and cloisters? And yet, to have this feeling for a boy—for one almost young enough to be her son! It was so—shameless! The thought haunted her, made her flush in the dark, lying awake at night. And desperately she would pray—for she was devout—pray to be made pure, to be given the holy feelings of a mother, to be filled simply with the sense that she could do everything, suffer anything for his sake, for his good. After these long prayers she would feel calmed, drowsy, as though she had taken a drug. For hours, perhaps, she would stay like that. And then it would all come over her again. She never thought of his loving her; that would be—unnatural. Why should he love her? She was very humble about it. Ever since that Sunday, when she avoided the confessional, she had brooded over how to make an end—how to get away from a longing too strong for her. And she had hit on this plan—to beg for the mountains, to go back to where her husband had come into her life, and try if this feeling would not die. If it did not, she would ask to be left out there with her own people, away from this danger. And now the fool—the blind fool—the superior fool—with his satiric smile, his everlasting patronage, had driven her to overturn her own plan. Well, let him take the consequences; she had done her best! She would have this one fling of joy, even if it meant that she must stay out there, and never see the boy again!

Standing in her dusky hall, where a faint scent of woodrot crept out into the air, whenever windows and doors were closed, she was all tremulous with secret happiness. To be with him among her mountains, to show him all those wonderful, glittering or tawny crags, to go with him to the top of them and see the kingdoms of the world spread out below; to wander with him

in the pine woods, on the Alps in all the scent of the trees and the flowers, where the sun was hot! The first of July; and it was only the tenth of June! Would she ever live so long? They would not go to San Martino this time, rather to Cortina—some new place that had no memories!

She moved from the window, and busied herself with a bowl of flowers. She had heard the humming sound which often heralded her husband's approach, as though warning the world to recover its good form before he reached it. In her happiness she felt kind and friendly to him. If he had not meant to give her joy, he had nevertheless given it! He came downstairs two at a time, with that air of not being a pedagogue, which she knew so well; and, taking his hat off the stand, half turned round to her.

"Pleasant youth, young Lennan; hope he won't bore us out there!"

His voice seemed to have an accent of compunction, to ask pardon for having issued that impulsive invitation. And there came to her an overwhelming wish to laugh. To hide it, to find excuse for it, she ran up to him, and, pulling his coat lapels till his face was within reach, she kissed the tip of his nose. And then she laughed. And he stood looking at her, with his head just a little on one side, and his eyebrows just a little raised.

IV

When young Mark heard a soft tapping at his door, though out of bed, he was getting on but dreamily—it was so jolly to watch the mountains lying out in this early light like huge beasts. The one they were going up, with its head just raised above its paws, looked very far away out there! Opening the door an inch, he whispered:

"Is it late?"

"Five o'clock; aren't you ready?"

It was awfully rude of him to keep her waiting! And he was soon down in the empty dining-room, where a sleepy maid was already bringing in their coffee. Anna was there alone. She had on a flax-blue shirt, open at the neck, a short green skirt, and a grey-green velvety hat, small, with one blackcock's feather. Why could not people always wear such nice things, and be as splendid-looking! And he said:

"You do look jolly, Mrs. Stormer!"

She did not answer for so long that he wondered if it had been rude to say that. But she *did* look so strong, and swift, and happy-looking.

Down the hill, through a wood of larch-trees, to the river, and across the bridge, to mount at once by a path through hay-fields. How could old Stormer stay in bed on such a morning! The peasant girls in their blue linen skirts were already gathering into bundles what the men had scythed. One, raking at the edge of a field, paused and shyly nodded to them. She had the face of a Madonna, very calm and grave and sweet, with delicate arched brows—a face it was pure pleasure to see. The boy looked back at her. Everything to him, who had never been out of England before, seemed strange and glamorous. The châlets, with their long wide burnt-brown wooden balconies and low-hanging eaves jutting far beyond the walls; these bright dresses of the peasant women; the friendly little cream-coloured cows, with blunt, smoke-grey muzzles. Even the feel in the air was new, that delicious crisp burning warmth that lay so lightly as it were on the surface of frozen stillness; and the special sweetness of all places at the foot of mountains—scent of pine-gum, burning larch-wood, and all the meadow flowers and

grasses. But newest of all was the feeling within him—a sort of pride, a sense of importance, a queer exhilaration at being alone with her, chosen companion of one so beautiful.

They passed all the other pilgrims bound the same way—stout square Germans with their coats slung through straps, who trailed behind them heavy alpenstocks, carried greenish bags, and marched stolidly at a pace which never varied, growling, as Anna and the boy went by: *"Aber eilen ist nichts!"*

But those two could not go fast enough to keep pace with their spirits. This was no real climb—just a training walk to the top of the Nuvolau; and they were up before noon, and soon again descending, very hungry. When they entered the little dining-room of the Cinque Torre Hütte, they found it occupied by a party of English people, eating omelettes, who looked at Anna with faint signs of recognition, but did not cease talking in voices which all had a certain half-languid precision, a slight but brisk pinching of sounds, as if determined not to tolerate a drawl, and yet to have one. Most of them had field-glasses slung round them, and cameras were dotted here and there about the room. Their faces were not really much alike, but they all had a peculiar drooping smile, and a particular lift of the eyebrows, which made them seem reproductions of a single type. Their teeth, too, for the most part were a little prominent, as though the drooping of their mouths had forced them forward. They were eating as people eat who distrust the lower senses, preferring not to be compelled to taste or smell.

"From our hotel," whispered Anna; and, ordering red wine and *schnitzels,* she and the boy sat down. The lady who seemed in command of the English party inquired now how Mr. Stormer was—he was not laid up, she hoped. No? Only lazy? Indeed! He was a great climber, she believed. It seemed to the boy that this lady somehow did not quite approve of them. The talk was all maintained between her, a gentleman with a crumpled collar and puggaree, and a short thickset grey-bearded man in a dark Norfolk jacket. If any of the younger members of the party spoke, the remark was received with an arch lifting of the brows, and drooping of the lids, as who should say: "Ah! Very promising!"

"Nothing in my life has given me greater pain than to observe the aptitude of human nature for becoming crystallised." It was the lady in command who spoke, and all the young people swayed their faces up and down, as if assenting. How like they

were, the boy thought, to guinea-fowl, with their small heads and sloping shoulders and speckly grey coats!

"Ah! my dear lady"—it was the gentleman with the crumpled collar—"you novelists are always girding at the precious quality of conformity. The sadness of our times lies in this questioning spirit. Never was there more revolt, especially among the young. To find the individual judging for himself is a grave symptom of national degeneration. But this is not a subject——"

"Surely, the subject is of the most poignant interest to all young people." Again all the young ones raised their faces and moved them slightly from side to side.

"My dear lady, we are too prone to let the interest that things arouse blind our judgment in regard to the advisability of discussing them. We let these speculations creep and creep until they twine themselves round our faith and paralyse it."

One of the young men interjected suddenly: "Madre——" and was silent.

"I shall not, I think"—it was the lady speaking—"be accused of licence when I say that I have always felt that speculation is only dangerous when indulged in by the crude intelligence. If culture has nothing to give us, then let us have no culture; but if culture be, as I think it, indispensable, then we must accept the dangers that culture brings."

Again the young people moved their faces, and again the younger of the two young men said: "Madre——"

"Dangers? Have cultured people dangers?"

Who had spoken thus? Every eyebrow was going up, every mouth was drooping, and there was silence. The boy stared at his companion. In what a strange voice she had made that little interjection! There seemed a sort of flame, too, lighted in her eyes. Then the little grey-bearded man said, and his rather whispering voice sounded hard and acid:

"We are all human, my dear madam."

The boy felt his heart go thump at Anna's laugh. It was just as if she had said: "Ah! but not you—surely!" And he got up to follow her towards the door.

The English party had begun already talking—of the weather.

The two walked some way from the "hut" in silence, before Anna said:

"You didn't like me when I laughed?"

"You hurt their feelings, I think."

"I wanted to—the English Grundys! Ah! don't be cross with me! They *were* English Grundys, weren't they—every one?"

She looked into his face so intently that he felt the blood rush to his cheeks, and a dizzy sensation of being drawn forward.

"They have no blood, those people! Their voices, their supercilious eyes that look you up and down! Oh! I've had so much of them! That woman with her Liberalism, just as bad as any. I hate them all!"

He would have liked to hate them, too; but they had only seemed to him amusing.

"They aren't human. They don't *feel!* Some day you'll know them. They won't amuse you then!"

She went on, in a quiet, almost dreamy voice:

"Why do they come here? It's still young and warm and good out here. Why don't they keep to their Culture, where no one knows what it is to ache and feel hunger, and hearts don't beat. Feel!"

Disturbed beyond measure, the boy could not tell whether it was in her heart or in his hand that the blood was pulsing so. Was he glad or sorry when she let his hand go?

"Ah, well! They can't spoil this day. Let's rest."

Growing at the edge of the larch-wood where they sat were numbers of little mountain pinks, with fringed edges and the sweetest scent imaginable; and she got up presently to gather them. But he stayed where he was, and odd sensations stirred in him. The blue of the sky, the feathery green of the larch trees, the mountains, were no longer to him what they had been early that morning.

She came back with her hands full of the little pinks, spread her fingers and let them drop. They showered all over his face and neck. Never was so wonderful a scent; never such a strange feeling as they gave him. They clung to his hair, his forehead, his eyes, one even got caught on the curve of his lips; and he stared up at her through their fringed petals. There must have been something wild in his eyes then, something of the feeling that was stinging his heart, for her smile died; she walked away, and stood with her face turned from him. Confused, and unhappy, he gathered the strewn flowers; and not till he had collected every one did he get up and shyly take them to her, where she still stood, gazing into the depths of the larch-wood.

V

WHAT did he know of women, that should make him understand? At his public school he had seen none to speak to; at Oxford, only this one. At home in the holidays, not any, save his sister Cicely. The two hobbies of their guardian, fishing, and the antiquities of his native county, rendered him averse to society; so that his little Devonshire manor-house, with its black oak panels and its wild stone-walled park along the riverside was, from year's end to year's end, innocent of all petticoats, save those of Cicely and old Miss Tring, the governess. Then, too, the boy was shy. No, there was nothing in his past, of not yet quite nineteen years, to go by. He was not of those youths who are always thinking of conquests. The very idea of conquest seemed to him vulgar, mean, horrid. There must be many signs indeed before it would come into his head that a woman was in love with him, especially the one to whom he looked up, and thought so beautiful. For before all beauty he was humble, inclined to think himself a clod. It was the part of life which was always unconsciously sacred, and to be approached trembling. The more he admired, the more tremulous and diffident he became. And so, after his one wild moment, when she plucked those sweet-scented blossoms and dropped them over him, he felt abashed; and walking home beside her he was quieter than ever, awkward to the depths of his soul.

If there were confusion in his heart which had been innocent of trouble, what must there have been in hers, that for so long had secretly desired the dawning of that confusion? And she, too, was very silent.

Passing a church with open door in the outskirts of the village, she said:

"Don't wait for me—I want to go in here a little."

In the empty twilight within, one figure, a countrywoman in her black shawl, was kneeling—marvellously still. He would have liked to stay. That kneeling figure, the smile of the sunlight filtering through into the half darkness! He lingered long enough to see Anna, too, go down on her knees in the stillness. Was she praying? Again he had the turbulent feeling with which he had watched her pluck those flowers. She looked so

splendid kneeling there! It was caddish to feel like that, when she was praying, and he turned quickly away into the road. But that sharp, sweet stinging sensation did not leave him. He shut his eyes to get rid of her image—and instantly she became ten times more visible, his feeling ten times stronger. He mounted to the hotel; there on the terrace was his tutor. And oddly enough, the sight of him at that moment was no more embarrassing than if it had been the hotel concierge. Stormer did not somehow seem to count; did not seem to want you to count him. Besides, he was so old—nearly fifty!

The man who was so old was posed in a characteristic attitude—hands in the pockets of his Norfolk jacket, one shoulder slightly raised, head just a little on one side, as if preparing to quiz something. He spoke as Lennan came up, smiling—but not with his eyes.

"Well, young man, and what have you done with my wife?"

"Left her in a church, sir."

"Ah! She will do that! Has she run you off your legs? No? Then let's walk and talk a little."

To be thus pacing up and down and talking with her husband seemed quite natural, did not even interfere with those new sensations, did not in the least increase his shame for having them. He only wondered a little how she could have married him—but so little! Quite far and academic was his wonder—like his wonder in old days how his sister could care to play with dolls. If he had any other feeling, it was just a longing to get away and go down the hill again to the church. It seemed cold and lonely after all that long day with her—as if he had left himself up there, walking along hour after hour, or lying out in the sun beside her. What was old Stormer talking about? The difference between the Greek and Roman views of honour. Always in the past—seemed to think the present was bad form. And he said:

"We met some English Grundys, sir, on the mountain."

"Ah, yes! Any particular brand?"

"Some advanced, and some not; but all the same, I think, really."

"I see. Grundys, I think you said?"

"Yes, sir, from this hotel. It was Mrs. Stormer's name for them. They were so very superior."

"Quite."

There was something unusual in the tone of that little word.

And the boy stared—for the first time there seemed a real man standing there. Then the blood rushed up into his cheeks, for there she was! Would she come up to them? How splendid she was looking, burnt by the sun, and walking as if just starting! But she passed into the hotel without turning her head their way. Had he offended, hurt her? He made an excuse, and got away to his room.

In the window from which that same morning he had watched the mountains lying out like lions in the dim light, he stood again, and gazed at the sun dropping over the high horizon. What had happened to him? He felt so different, so utterly different. It was another world. And the most strange feeling came on him, as of the flowers falling again all over his face and neck and hands, the tickling of their soft-fringed edges, the stinging sweetness of their scent. And he seemed to hear her voice saying: "Feel!" and to feel her heart once more beating under his hand.

VI

Alone with that black-shawled figure in the silent church, Anna did not pray. Resting there on her knees, she experienced only the sore sensation of revolt. Why had Fate flung this feeling into her heart, lighted up her life suddenly, if God refused her its enjoyment? Some of the mountain pinks remained clinging to her belt, and the scent of them, crushed against her, warred with the faint odour of age and incense. While they were there, with their enticement and their memories, prayer would never come. But did she want to pray? Did she desire the mood of that poor soul in her black shawl, who had not moved by one hair's breadth since she had been watching her, who seemed resting her humble self so utterly, letting life lift from her, feeling the relief of nothingness? Ah, yes! what would it be to have a life so toilsome, so little exciting from day to day and hour to hour, that just to kneel there in wistful stupor was the greatest pleasure one could know? It was beautiful to see her, but it was sad. And there came over Anna a longing to go up to her neighbour and say: "Tell me your troubles; we are both women." She had lost a son, perhaps, some love—or perhaps not really love, only some illusion. Ah! Love. . . . Why should any spirit yearn, why should any body, full of strength and joy, wither slowly away for want of love? Was there not enough in this great world for her, Anna, to have a little? She would not harm him, for she would know when he had had enough of her; she would surely have the pride and grace then to let him go. For, of course, he would get tired of her. At her age she could never hope to hold a boy more than a few years—months, perhaps. But would she ever hold him at all? Youth was so hard—it had no heart! And then the memory of his eyes came back—gazing up, troubled, almost wild—when she had dropped on him those flowers. That memory filled her with a sort of delirium. One look from her then, one touch, and he would have clasped her to him. She was sure of it, yet scarcely dared to believe what meant so much. And suddenly the torment that she must go through, whatever happened, seemed to her too brutal and undeserved! She rose. Just one gleam of sunlight was still slanting through the doorway; it failed by a yard or so

to reach the kneeling countrywoman, and Anna watched. Would it steal on and touch her, or would the sun pass down behind the mountains, and fade away? Unconscious of that issue, the black-shawled figure knelt, never moving. And the beam crept on. "If it touches her, then he will love me, if only for an hour; if it fades out too soon——" And the beam crept on. That shadowy path of light, with its dancing dust-motes, was it indeed charged with Fate—indeed the augury of Love or Darkness? And, slowly moving, it mounted, the sun sinking; it rose above that bent head, hovered in a golden mist, passed—and suddenly was gone.

Unsteadily, seeing nothing plain, Anna walked out of the church. Why she passed her husband and the boy on the terrace without a look she could not quite have said—perhaps because the tortured does not salute her torturers. When she reached her room she felt deadly tired, and lying down on her bed, almost at once fell asleep.

She was awakened by a sound, and, recognising the delicate "rat-tat" of her husband's knock, did not answer, indifferent whether he came in or no. He entered noiselessly. If she did not let him know she was awake, he would not wake her. She lay still and watched him sit down astride of a chair, cross his arms on its back, rest his chin on them, and fix his eyes on her. Through her veil of eyelashes she had unconsciously contrived that his face should be the one object plainly seen—the more intensely visualised, because of this queer isolation. She did not feel at all ashamed of this mutual fixed scrutiny, in which she had such advantage. He had never shown her what was in him, never revealed what lay behind those bright satiric eyes. Now, perhaps, she would see! And she lay, regarding him with the intense excited absorption with which one looks at a tiny wild-flower through a magnifying-lens, and watches its insignificance expanded to the size and importance of a hothouse bloom. In her mind was this thought: He is looking at me with his real self, since he has no reason for armour against me now. At first his eyes seemed masked with their customary brightness, his whole face with its usual decorous formality; then gradually he became so changed that she hardly knew him. That decorousness, that brightness, melted off what lay behind, as frosty dew melts off grass. And her very soul contracted within her, as if she had become identified with what he was seeing—a something to be passed over, a very nothing. Yes, his was the face of one

looking at what was unintelligible, and therefore negligible; at that which had no soul; at something of a different and inferior species and of no great interest to a man. His face was like a soundless avowal of some conclusion, so fixed and intimate that it must surely emanate from the very core of him—be instinctive, unchangeable. This was the real he! A man despising women! Her first thought was: And he's married—what a fate! Her second: If he feels that, perhaps thousands of men do! Am I and all women really what they think us? The conviction in his stare—its through-and-through conviction—had infected her; and she gave in to it for the moment, crushed. Then her spirit revolted with such turbulence, and the blood so throbbed in her, that she could hardly lie still. How dare he think her like that—a nothing, a bundle of soulless inexplicable whims and moods and sensuality? A thousand times, No! It was *he* who was the soulless one, the dry, the godless one; who, in his sickening superiority, could thus deny her, and with her all women! That stare was as if he saw her—a doll tricked out in garments labelled soul, spirit, rights, responsibilities, dignity, freedom—all so many words. It was vile, it was horrible, that he should see her thus! And a really terrific struggle began in her between the desire to get up and cry this out, and the knowledge that it would be stupid, undignified, even mad, to show comprehension of what he would never admit or even understand that he had revealed to her. And then cynicism came to her rescue. What a funny thing was married life—to have lived all these years with him, and never known what was at the bottom of his heart! She had the feeling now that, if she went up to him and said: "I am in love with that boy!" it would only make him droop the corners of his mouth and say in his most satiric voice: "Really! That is very interesting! Shall you invite me to the wedding?"—that it would only confirm him in the conviction that she was neglible, inexplicable, an inferior strange form of animal, of no real interest to him.

And then, just when she felt that she could not hold herself in any longer, he got up, passed on tiptoe to the door, opened it noiselessly, and went out.

The moment he had gone, she jumped up. So, then, she was linked to one for whom she, for whom women, did not, as it were, exist! It seemed to her that she had stumbled on knowledge of almost sacred importance, on the key of everything puzzling and hopeless in their married life. If he really, secretly,

whole-heartedly despised her, the only feeling she need have for one so dry, so narrow, so basically stupid, was just contempt. But she knew well enough that contempt would not shake what she had seen in his face; he was impregnably walled within his clever, dull conviction of superiority. He was for ever intrenched, and she would always be only the assailant. Though—what did it matter, now?

Usually swift, almost careless, she was a long time that evening over her toilette. Her neck was very sunburnt, and she lingered, doubtful whether to hide it with powder, or accept her gipsy colouring. She did accept it, for she saw that it gave her eyes, so like glacier ice, under their black lashes, and her hair, with its surprising glints of flame colour, a peculiar value.

When the dinner-bell rang she passed her husband's door without, as usual, knocking, and went down alone.

In the hall she noticed some of the English party of the mountain hut. They did not greet her, conceiving an immediate interest in the barometer; but she could feel them staring at her very hard. She sat down to wait, and at once became conscious of the boy coming over from the other side of the room, rather like a person walking in his sleep. He said not a word. But how he gazed! And her heart began to beat. Was this the moment she had longed for? If it, indeed, had come, dared she take it? Then she saw her husband descending the stairs, saw him greet the English party, heard the intoning of their drawl. She looked up at the boy, and said quickly: "Was it a happy day?" It gave her such delight to keep the look on his face, as if he had forgotten everything except just the sight of her. His eyes seemed to have in them something holy at that moment, something of the wonder-yearning of Nature and of innocence. It was dreadful to know that in a moment the look would be gone; perhaps never to come back on his face—that look so precious! Her husband was approaching now! Let him see, if he would! Let him see that someone could adore—that she was not to everyone a kind of lower animal. Yes, he must have seen the boy's face; and yet his expression never changed. He noticed nothing! Or was it that he disdained to notice?

VII

THEN followed for young Lennan a strange time, when he never knew from minute to minute whether he was happy—always trying to be with her, restless if he could not be, sore if she talked with and smiled at others; yet, when he was with her, restless too, unsatisfied, suffering from his own timidity.

One wet morning, when she was playing the hotel piano, and he listening, thinking to have her to himself, there came a young German violinist—pale, and with a brown, thin-waisted coat, longish hair, and little whiskers—rather a beast, in fact. Soon, of course, this young beast was asking her to accompany him—as if anyone wanted to hear him play his mouldy violin! Every word and smile that she gave him hurt, seeing how much more interesting than himself this foreigner was! And his heart grew heavier and heavier, and he thought: If she likes him I ought not to mind—only, I *do* mind! How can I help minding? It was hateful to see her smiling, and the young beast bending down to her. And they were talking German, so that he could not tell what they were saying, which made it more unbearable. He had not known there could be such torture.

And then he began to want to hurt her, too. But that was mean—besides, how could he hurt her? She did not care for him. He was nothing to her—only a boy. If she really thought him only a boy, who felt so old—it would be horrible. It flashed across him that she might be playing that young violinist against him! No, she never would do that! But the young beast looked just the sort who might take advantage of her smiles. If only he *would* do something that was not respectful, how splendid it would be to ask him to come for a walk in the woods, and, having told him why, give him a thrashing. Afterwards, he would not tell her, he would not try to gain credit by it. He would keep away till she wanted him back. But suddenly the thought of what he would feel if she really meant to take this young man as her friend in place of him became so actual, so poignant, so horribly painful, that he got up abruptly and went towards the door. Would she not say a word to him before he got out of the room, would she not try and keep him? If she did not, surely it would be all over; it would mean that anybody was more to her

than he. That little journey to the door, indeed, seemed like a march to execution. Would she not call after him. He looked back. She was smiling. But *he* could not smile; she had hurt him too much! Turning his head away, he went out, and dashed into the rain bareheaded. The feeling of it on his face gave him a sort of dismal satisfaction. Soon he would be wet through. Perhaps he would get ill. Out here, far away from his people, she would have to offer to nurse him; and perhaps—perhaps in his illness he would seem to her again more interesting than that young beast, and then—— Ah! if only he could be ill!

He mounted rapidly through the dripping leaves towards the foot of the low mountain which rose behind the hotel. A trail went up there to the top, and he struck into it, going at a great pace. His sense of injury began dying away; he no longer wanted to be ill. The rain had stopped, the sun came out; he went on, up and up. He would get to the top quicker than anyone ever had! It was something he could do better than that young beast! The pine-trees gave way to stunted larches, and these to pine scrub and bare scree, up which he scrambled, clutching at the tough bushes, terribly out of breath, his heart pumping, the sweat streaming into his eyes. He had no feeling now but wonder whether he would get to the top before he dropped, exhausted. He thought he would die of the beating of his heart; but it was better to die than to stop and be beaten by a few yards. He stumbled up at last on to the little plateau at the top. For full ten minutes he lay there on his face without moving, then rolled over. His heart had given up that terrific thumping; he breathed luxuriously, stretched out his arms along the steaming grass—felt happy. It was wonderful up here, with the sun burning hot in a sky clear-blue already. How tiny everything looked below—hotel, trees, village, châlets—little toy things! He had never before felt the sheer joy of being high up. The rain-clouds, torn and driven in huge white shapes along the mountains to the South, were like an army of giants with chariots and white horses hurrying away. He thought suddenly: 'Suppose I had died when my heart pumped so! Would it have mattered the least bit? Everything would be going on just the same, the sun shining, the blue up there the same; and those toy things down in the valley.' That jealousy of his an hour ago, why—it was nothing—he himself nothing! What did it matter if she were nice to that fellow in the brown coat? What

did anything matter when the whole thing was so big—and he such a tiny scrap of it?

On the edge of the plateau, to mark the highest point, someone had erected a rude cross, which jutted out stark against the blue sky. It looked cruel somehow, sagged all crooked, and out of place up here; a piece of bad manners, as if people with only one idea had dragged it in, without caring whether or no it suited what was around it. One might just as well introduce one of these rocks into that jolly dark church where he had left her the other day, as put a cross up here.

A sound of bells, and of sniffing and scuffling, roused him; a large grey goat had come up and was smelling at his hair—the leader of a flock, soon all round him, solemnly curious, with their queer yellow oblong-pupilled eyes, and their quaint little beards and tails. Awfully decent beasts—and friendly! What jolly things to model! He lay still (having learnt from the fisherman, his guardian, that necessary habit in the presence of all beasts), while the leader sampled the flavour of his neck. The passage of that long rough tongue athwart his skin gave him an agreeable sensation, awakened a strange deep sense of comradeship. He restrained his desire to stroke the creature's nose. It appeared that they now all wished to taste his neck; but some were timid, and the touch of their tongues simply a tickle, so that he was compelled to laugh, and at that peculiar sound they withdrew and gazed at him. There seemed to be no one with them; then, at a little distance, quite motionless in the shade of a rock, he spied the goatherd, a boy about his own age. How lonely he must be up here all day! Perhaps he talked to his goats. He looked as if he might. One would get to have queer thoughts up here, get to know the rocks, and clouds, and beasts, and what they all meant. The goatherd uttered a peculiar whistle, and something, Lennan could not tell exactly what, happened among the goats—a sort of "Here, sir!" seemed to come from them. And then the goatherd moved out from the shade and went over to the edge of the plateau, and two of the goats feeding there thrust their noses into his hand, and rubbed themselves against his legs. The three looked beautiful standing together on the edge against the sky. . . .

That night, after dinner, the dining-room was cleared for dancing, so that the guests might feel freedom and gaiety in the air. And, indeed, presently, a couple began sawing up and down over the polished boards, in the apologetic manner peculiar

to hotel guests. Then three pairs of Italians suddenly launched themselves into space—twirling and twirling, and glaring into each other's eyes; and some Americans, stimulated by their precept, began airily backing and filling. Two of the "English Grundys" with carefully amused faces next moved out. To Lennan it seemed that they all danced very well, better than he could. Did he dare ask *her?* Then he saw the young violinist go up, saw her rise and take his arm and vanish into the dancing-room; and leaning his forehead against a window-pane, with a sick, beaten feeling, he stayed, looking out into the moonlight, seeing nothing. He heard his name spoken; his tutor was standing beside him.

"You and I, Lennan, must console each other. Dancing's for the young, eh?"

Fortunately it was the boy's instinct and his training not to show his feelings; to be pleasant, though suffering.

"Yes, sir. Jolly moonlight, isn't it, out there?"

"Ah! very jolly; yes. When I was your age I twirled the light fantastic with the best. But gradually, Lennan, one came to see it could not be done without a partner—there was the rub! Tell me—do you regard women as responsible beings? I should like to have your opinion on that."

It was, of course, ironical—yet there was something in those words—something!

"I think it's you, sir, who ought to give me yours."

"My dear Lennan—my experience is a mere nothing!"

That was meant for unkindness to her! He would not answer. If only Stormer would go away! The music had stopped. They would be sitting out somewhere, talking! He made an effort, and said:

"I was up the hill at the back this morning, where the cross is. There were some jolly goats."

And suddenly he saw her coming. She was alone—flushed, smiling; it struck him that her frock was the same colour as the moonlight.

"Harold, will you dance?"

He would say "Yes," and she would be gone again! But his tutor only made her a little bow, and said with that smile of his:

"Lennan and I have agreed that dancing is for the young."

"Sometimes the old must sacrifice themselves. Mark, will you dance?"

Behind him he heard his tutor murmur:

"Ah! Lennan—you betray me!"

That little silent journey with her to the dancing-room was the happiest moment perhaps that he had ever known. And he need not have been so much afraid about his dancing. Truly, it was not polished, but it could not spoil hers, so light, firm, buoyant! It was wonderful to dance with her. Only when the music stopped and they sat down did he know how his head was going round. He felt strange, very strange indeed. He heard her say:

"What is it, dear boy? You look so white!"

Without quite knowing what he did, he bent his face towards the hand that she had laid on his sleeve, then knew no more, having fainted.

VIII

Growing boy—over-exertion in the morning! That was all! He was himself very quickly, and walked up to bed without assistance. Rotten of him! Never was anyone more ashamed of his little weakness than this boy. Now that he was really a trifle indisposed, he simply could not bear the idea of being nursed at all or tended. Almost rudely he had got away. Only when he was in bed did he remember the look on her face as he left her. How wistful and unhappy, seeming to implore him to forgive her! As if there were anything to forgive! As if she had not made him perfectly happy when she danced with him! He longed to say to her: "If I might be close to you like that one minute every day, then I don't mind all the rest!" Perhaps he would dare say that to-morrow. Lying there he still felt a little funny. He had forgotten to close the ribs of the blinds, and moonlight was filtering in; but he was too idle, too drowsy to get up now and do it. They had given him brandy, rather a lot—that perhaps was the reason he felt so queer; not ill, but mazy, as if dreaming, as if he had lost the desire ever to move again. Just to lie there, and watch the powdery moonlight, and hear far-away music throbbing down below, and still feel the touch of her, as in the dance she swayed against him, and all the time to have the scent about him of flowers! His thoughts were dreams, his dreams thoughts—all precious unreality. And then it seemed to him that the moonlight was gathered into a single slip of pallor—there was a thrumming, a throbbing, and that shape of moonlight moved towards him. It came so close that he felt its warmth against his brow; it sighed, hovered, drew back soundless, and was gone. He must have fallen then into dreamless sleep. . . .

What time was it when he was awakened by that delicate "rat-tat" to see his tutor standing in the doorway with a cup of tea?

Was young Lennan all right? Yes, he was perfectly all right—would be down directly! It was most frightfully good of Mr. Stormer to come! He really didn't want anything.

Yes, yes; but the maimed and the halt must be attended to!

His face seemed to the boy very kind just then—only to laugh

at him a very little—just enough. And it was awfully decent of him to have come, and to stand there while he drank the tea. He was really all right, but for a little headache. Many times while he was dressing he stood still, trying to remember. That white slip of moonlight? Was it moonlight? Was it part of a dream; or was it, could it have been she, in her moonlight-coloured frock? Why had he not stayed awake? He would not dare to ask her, and now would never know whether the vague memory of warmth on his brow had been a kiss.

He breakfasted alone in the room where they had danced. There were two letters for him. One from his guardian enclosing money, and complaining of the shyness of the trout; the other from his sister. The man she was engaged to—he was a budding diplomat, attached to the Embassy at Rome—was afraid that his leave was going to be curtailed. They would have to be married at once. They might even have to get a special licence. It was lucky Mark was coming back so soon. They simply *must* have him for best man. The only bridesmaid now would be Sylvia . . . Sylvia Doone? Why, she was only a kid! And the memory of a little girl in a very short holland frock, with flaxen hair, pretty blue eyes, and a face so fair that you could almost see through it, came up before him. But that, of course, was six years ago; she would not still be in a frock that showed her knees, or wear beads, or be afraid of bulls that were never there. It was stupid being best man—they might have got some decent chap! And then he forgot all—for there was *she*, out on the terrace. In his rush to join her he passed several of the "English Grundys," who stared at him askance. Indeed, his conduct of the night before might well have upset them. An Oxford man, fainting in an hotel! Something wrong there! . . .

And then, when he reached her, he did find courage.

"Was it really moonlight?"

"All moonlight."

"But it was warm!"

And, when she did not answer that, he had within him just the same light, intoxicated feeling as after he had won a race at school.

But now came a dreadful blow. His tutor's old guide had suddenly turned up, after a climb with a party of Germans. The war-horse had been aroused in Stormer. He wished to start that afternoon for a certain hut, and go up a certain peak at dawn next day. But Lennan was not to go. Why not? Because

of last night's faint; and because, forsooth, he was not some stupid thing they called "an expert." As if——! Where she could go he could! This was to treat him like a child. Of course he could go up this rotten mountain. It was because she did not care enough to take him! She did not think him man enough! Did she think that he could not climb what—her husband—could? And if it were dangerous *she* ought not to be going, leaving him behind—that was simply cruel! But she only smiled, and he flung away from her, not having seen that all this grief of his only made her happy.

And that afternoon they went off without him. What deep, dark thoughts he had then! What passionate hatred of his own youth! What schemes he wove, by which she might come back, and find him gone—up some mountain far more dangerous and fatiguing! If people did not think him fit to climb with, he would climb by himself. That, anyway, everyone admitted, was dangerous. And it would be her fault. She would be sorry then. He would get up, and be off before dawn; he put his things out ready, and filled his flask. The moonlight that evening was more wonderful than ever, the mountains like great ghosts of themselves. And she was up there at the hut, among them! It was very long before he went to sleep, brooding over his injuries —intending not to sleep at all, so as to be ready to be off at three o'clock. At *nine* o'clock he woke. His wrath was gone; he only felt restless and ashamed. If, instead of flying out, he had made the best of it, he could have gone with them as far as the hut, could have stayed the night there. And now he cursed himself for being such a fool and idiot. Some little of that idiocy he could, perhaps, retrieve. If he started for the hut at once, he might still be in time to meet them coming down, and accompany them home. He swallowed his coffee, and set off. He knew the way at first, then in woods lost it, recovered the right track again at last, but did not reach the hut till nearly two o'clock. Yes, the party had made the ascent that morning—they had been seen, been heard jödelling on the top. *Gewiss! Gewiss!* But they would not come down the same way. Oh, no! They would be going home down to the west and over the other pass. They would be back in house before the young *Herr* himself.

He heard this, oddly, almost with relief. Was it the long walk alone, or being up there so high? Or simply that he was very hungry? Or just these nice friendly folk in the hut, and their young daughter with her fresh face, queer little black cloth sailor

hat with long ribbons, velvet bodice, and perfect simple manners; or the sight of the little silvery-dun cows, thrusting their broad black noses against her hand? What was it that had taken away from him all his restless feeling, made him happy and content? . . . He did not know that the newest thing always fascinates the puppy in its gambols! . . . He sat a long while after lunch, trying to draw the little cows, watching the sun on the cheek of that pretty maiden, trying to talk to her in German. And when at last he said: "Adieu!" and she murmured "*Küss die Hand. Adieu!*" there was quite a little pang in his heart. . . . Wonderful and queer is the heart of a man! . . . For all that, as he neared home he hastened, till he was actually running. Why had he stayed so long up there? She would be back—she would expect to see him; and that young beast of a violinist would be with her, perhaps, instead! He reached the hotel just in time to rush up and dress, and rush down to dinner. Ah! They were tired, no doubt—were resting in their rooms. He sat through dinner as best he could; got away before dessert, and flew upstairs. For a minute he stood there doubtful; on which door should he knock? Then timidly he tapped on hers. No answer! He knocked loud on his tutor's door. No answer! They were not back, then. Not back? What could that mean? Or could it be that they were both asleep. Once more he knocked on her door; then desperately turned the handle, and took a flying glance. Empty, tidy, untouched! Not back! He turned and ran downstairs again. All the guests were streaming out from dinner, and he became entangled with a group of "English Grundys" discussing a climbing accident which had occurred in Switzerland. He listened, feeling suddenly quite sick. One of them, the short grey-bearded Grundy with the rather whispering voice, said to him: "All alone again tonight? The Stormers not back?" Lennan did his best to answer, but something had closed his throat; he could only shake his head.

"They had a guide, I think?" said the "English Grundy."

This time Lennan managed to get out: "Yes, sir."

"Stormer, I fancy, is quite an expert!" and turning to the lady whom the young "Grundys" addressed as "Madre" he added:

"To me the great charm of mountain-climbing was always the freedom from people—the remoteness."

The mother of the young "Grundys," looking at Lennan with her half-closed eyes, answered:

"That, to me, would be the disadvantage; I always like to be mixing with my own kind."

The grey-bearded "Grundy" murmured in a muffled voice: "Dangerous thing, that, to say—in an hotel!"

And they went on talking, but of what Lennan no longer knew, lost in this sudden feeling of sick fear. In the presence of these "English Grundys," so superior to all vulgar sensations, he could not give vent to his alarm; already they viewed him as unsound for having fainted. Then he grasped that there had begun all round him a sort of luxurious speculation on what might have happened to the Stormers. The descent was very nasty; there was a particularly bad traverse. The "Grundy," whose collar was not now crumpled, said he did not believe in women climbing. It was one of the signs of the times that he most deplored. The mother of the young "Grundys" countered him at once: In practice she agreed that they were out of place, but theoretically she could not see why they should not climb. An American standing near threw all into confusion by saying he guessed that it might be liable to develop their understandings. Lennan made for the front door. The moon had just come up over in the south, and exactly under it he could see their mountain. What visions he had then! He saw her lying dead, saw himself climbing down in the moonlight and raising her still-living, but half-frozen, form from some perilous ledge. Even that was almost better than this actuality of not knowing where she was, or what had happened. People passed out into the moonlight, looking curiously at his set face staring so fixedly. One or two asked him if he were anxious, and he answered: "Oh no, thanks!" Soon there would have to be a search party. How soon? He would, he must be, of it! They should not stop him this time. And suddenly he thought: 'Ah, it is all because I stayed up there this afternoon talking to that girl, all because I forgot *her!*'

And then he heard a stir behind him. There they were, coming down the passage from a side door—she in front with her alpenstock and rücksack—smiling. Instinctively he recoiled behind some plants. They passed. Her sunburned face, with its high cheek-bones and its deep-set eyes, looked so happy; smiling, tired, triumphant. Somehow he could not bear it, and when they were gone by he stole out into the wood and threw himself down in shadow, burying his face, and choking back a horrible dry sobbing that would keep rising in his throat.

IX

Next day he was happy; for all the afternoon he lay out in the shade of that same wood at her feet, gazing up through larch-boughs. It was so wonderful, with nobody but Nature near. Nature so alive, and busy, and so big!

Coming down from the hut the day before, he had seen a peak looking exactly like the figure of a woman with a garment over her head, the biggest statue in the world; from further down it had become the shape of a bearded man, with his arm bent over his eyes. Had she seen it? Had she noticed how all the mountains in moonlight or very early morning took the form of beasts? What he wanted most in life was to be able to make images of beasts and creatures of all sorts, that were like—that had—that gave out the spirit of—Nature; so that by just looking at them one could have all those jolly feelings one had when one was watching trees, and beasts, and rocks, and even some sorts of men—but not "English Grundys."

So he was quite determined to study Art?

Oh yes, of course!

He would want to leave—Oxford, then!

No, oh no! Only some day he would have to.

She answered: "Some never get away!"

And he said quickly: "Of course, I shall never want to leave Oxford while you are there."

He heard her draw her breath in sharply.

"Oh yes, you will! Now help me up!" And she led the way back to the hotel.

He stayed out on the terrace when she had gone in, restless and unhappy the moment he was away from her. A voice close by said:

"Well, friend Lennan—brown study, or blue devils, which?"

There, in one of those high wicker chairs which insulate their occupants from the world, he saw his tutor leaning back, head a little to one side, and tips of fingers pressed together. He looked like an idol sitting there inert, and yet—yesterday he had gone up that mountain!

"Cheer up! You will break your neck yet! When I was your

age, I remember feeling it deeply that I was not allowed to risk the lives of others."

Lennan stammered out:

"I didn't think of that; but I thought where Mrs. Stormer could go, I could."

"Ah! For all our admiration we cannot quite admit—can we, when it comes to the point?"

The boy's loyalty broke into flame:

"It's not that. I think Mrs. Stormer as good as any man—only—only——"

"Not quite so good as you, eh?"

"A hundred times better, sir."

Stormer smiled. Ironic beast!

"Lennan," he said, "distrust hyperbole."

"Of course, I know I'm no good at climbing," the boy broke out again; "but—but—I thought where she was allowed to risk her life, I ought to be!"

"Good! I like that." It was said so entirely without irony for once, that the boy was disconcerted.

"You are young, Brother Lennan," his tutor went on. "Now, at what age do you consider men develop discretion? Because, there is just one thing always worth remembering—women have none of that better part of valour."

"I think women are the best things in the world," the boy blurted out.

"May you long have that opinion!" His tutor had risen, and was ironically surveying his knees. "A bit stiff!" he said. "Let me know when you change your views!"

"I never shall, sir."

"Ah, ah! Never is a long word, Lennan. I am going to have some tea"; and gingerly he walked away, quizzing, as it were, with a smile, his own stiffness.

Lennan remained where he was, with burning cheeks. His tutor's words again had seemed directed against her. How could a man say such things about women! If they were true, he did not want to know; if they were not true, it was wicked to say them. It must be awful never to have generous feelings; always to have to be satirical. Dreadful to be like the "English Grundys"; only different, of course, because, after all, old Stormer was much more interesting and intelligent—ever so much more; only, just as "superior." "Some never get away!"

Had she meant—from that superiority? Just down below were a family of peasants scything and gathering in the grass. One could imagine her doing that, and looking beautiful, with a coloured handkerchief over her head; one could imagine her doing anything simple—one could not imagine old Stormer doing anything but what he did do. And suddenly the boy felt miserable, oppressed by these dim glimmerings of lives misplaced. And he resolved that he would not be like Stormer when he was old! No, he would rather be a regular beast than be like that! . . .

When he went to his room to change for dinner he saw in a glass of water a large clove carnation. Who had put it there? Who could have put it there—but she? It had the same scent as the mountain pinks she had dropped over him, but deeper, richer—a scent moving, dark, and sweet. He put his lips to it before he pinned it into his coat.

There was dancing again that night—more couples this time, and a violin beside the piano; and she had on a black frock. He had never seen her in black. Her face and neck were powdered over their sunburn. The first sight of that powder gave him a faint shock. He had not somehow thought that ladies ever put on powder. But if *she* did—then it must be right! And his eyes never left her. He saw the young German violinist hovering round her, even dancing with her twice; watched her dancing with others, but all without jealousy, without troubling; all in a sort of dream. What was it? Had he been bewitched into this queer state, bewitched by the gift of that flower in his coat? When he danced with her, what kept him happy in her silence and his own? There was no expectation in him of anything that she would say, or do—no expectation, no desire. Even when he wandered out with her on to the terrace, even when they went down the bank and sat on a bench above the fields where the peasants had been scything, he had still no feeling but that quiet, dreamy adoration. The night was black and dreamy too, for the moon was still well down behind the mountains. The little band was playing the next waltz; but he did not move, and did not think, as if all power of action and thought had been stolen out of him. And the scent of the flower in his coat rose, for there was no wind. Suddenly his heart stopped beating. She had leaned against him, he felt her shoulder press his arm, her hair touch his cheek. He closed his eyes then, and

turned his face to her. He felt her lips press his mouth with a swift, burning kiss. He sighed, stretched out his arms. There was nothing there but air. The rustle of her dress against the grass was all! The flower—it, too, was gone.

X

Not one minute all that night did Anna sleep. Was it remorse keeping her awake, or the intoxication of memory? If she felt that her kiss had been a crime, it was not against her husband or herself, but against the boy—the murder of illusion, of something sacred. But she could not help feeling a delirious happiness too, and the thought of trying to annul what she had done did not even occur to her.

He was ready, then, to give her a little love! Ever so little, compared to hers, but still a little! There could be no other meaning to that movement of his face with the closed eyes, as if he would nestle it down on her breast.

Was she ashamed of her little manœuvres of these last few days—ashamed of having smiled at the young violinist, of that late return from the mountain climb, of the flower she had given him, of all the conscious siege she had laid since the evening her husband came in and sat watching her, without knowing that she saw him? No; not really ashamed! Her remorse rose only from the kiss. It hurt to think of that, because it was death, the final extinction of the mother-feeling in her; the awakening of—who knew what—in the boy! For if she was mysterious to him, what was he not to her, with his eagerness, and his dreaminess, his youthful warmth, his innocence! What if it had killed in him trust, brushed off the dew, tumbled a star down? Could she forgive herself for that? Could she bear it if she were to make him like so many other boys, like that young violinist; just a cynical youth, looking on women as what they called "fair game"? But *could* she make him into such—would he ever grow like that? Oh! surely not; or she would not have loved him from the moment she first set eyes on him and spoke of him as "an angel."

After that kiss—crime, if it were one—in the dark she had not known what he had done, where gone—perhaps wandering, perhaps straight up to his room. Why had she refrained, left him there, vanished out of his arms? This she herself hardly understood. Not shame, not fear; reverence perhaps—for what? For love—for the illusion, the mystery, all that made love beautiful; for youth, and the poetry of it; just for the sake of the black

still night itself, and the scent of that flower—dark flower of passion which had won him to her, and which she had stolen back, and now wore all night long close to her neck, and in the morning placed withered within her dress. She had been starved so long, and so long waited for that moment—it was little wonder if she did not clearly know why she had done just this, and not that!

And now how should she meet him, how first look into his eyes? Would they have changed? Would they no longer have the straight look she so loved? It would be for her to lead, to make the future. And she kept saying to herself: "I am not going to be afraid. It is done. I will take what life offers!" Of her husband she did not think at all.

But the first moment she saw the boy, she knew that something from outside, and untoward had happened since that kiss. He came up to her, indeed, but he said nothing, stood trembling all over, and handed her a telegram that contained these words: "Come back at once Wedding immediate Expect you day after to-morrow. Cicely." The words grew indistinct even as she read them, and the boy's face all blurred. Then, making an effort, she said quietly:

"Of course, you must go. You cannot miss your only sister's wedding."

Without protest he looked at her; and she could hardly bear that look—it seemed to know so little, and ask so much. She said: "It is nothing—only a few days. You will come back, or we will come to you."

His face brightened at once.

"Will you really come to us soon, at once—if they ask you? Then I don't mind—I—I——" And then he stopped, choking.

She said again:

"Ask us. We will come."

He seized her hand; pressed and pressed it in both his own, then stroked it gently, and said:

"Oh! I'm hurting it!"

She laughed, not wishing to cry.

In a few minutes he would have to start to catch the only train that would get him home in time. She went and helped him to pack. Her heart felt like lead, but, not able to bear that look on his face again, she kept cheerfully talking of their return, asking about his home, how to get to it, speaking of Oxford and next term. When his things were ready she put her arms round

his neck, and for a moment pressed him to her. Then she escaped. Looking back from his door, she saw him standing exactly as when she had withdrawn her arms. Her cheeks were wet; she dried them as she went downstairs. When she felt herself safe, she went out on the terrace. Her husband was there, and she said to him:

"Will you come with me into the town? I want to buy some things."

He raised his eyebrows, smiled dimly, and followed her. They walked slowly down the hill into the long street of the little town. All the time she talked of she knew not what, and all the time she thought: 'His carriage will pass—his carriage will pass!'

Several carriages went jingling by. At last he came. Sitting there, and staring straight before him, he did not see them. She heard her husband say:

"Hullo! Where is our young friend Lennan off to, with his luggage—looking like a lion cub in trouble?"

She answered in a voice which she tried to make clear and steady:

"There must be something wrong; or else it is his sister's wedding."

She felt that her husband was gazing at her, and wondered what her face was like; but at that moment the word "Madre!" sounded close in her ear, and they were surrounded by a small drove of "English Grundys."

XI

THAT twenty mile drive was perhaps the worst part of the journey for the boy. It is always hard to sit still and suffer.

When Anna left him the night before, he had wandered about in the dark, not knowing quite where he went. Then the moon came up, and he found himself sitting under the eave of a barn close to a châlet where all was dark and quiet; and down below him the moon-whitened valley village—its roofs and spires and little glamorous unreal lights.

In his evening suit, his dark ruffled hair uncovered, he would have made a quaint spectacle for the owners of that châlet, if they had chanced to see him seated on the hay-strewn boards against their barn, staring before him with such wistful rapture. But they were folk to whom sleep was precious. . . .

And now it was all snatched away from him, relegated to some immensely far-off future. Would it indeed be possible to get his guardian to ask them down to Hayle? And would they really come? His tutor would surely never care to visit a place right away in the country—far from books and everything! He frowned, thinking of his tutor, but it was with perplexity—no other feeling. And yet, if he could not have them down there, how could he wait the two whole months till next term began! So went his thoughts, round and round, while the horses jogged, dragging him further and further from her.

It was better in the train; the distraction of all the strange crowd of foreigners, the interest of new faces and new country; and then sleep—a long night of it, snoozed up in his corner, thoroughly fagged out. And next day more new country, more new faces; and slowly, his mood changing from ache and bewilderment to a sense of something promised, delightful to look forward to. Then Calais at last, and a night-crossing in a wet little steamer, a summer gale blowing spray in his face, waves leaping white in a black sea, and the wild sound of the wind. On again to London, the early drive across the town, still sleepy in August haze; an English breakfast—porridge, chops, marmalade. And, at last, the train for home. At all events he could write to her, and tearing a page out of his little sketch-book, he began:

"I am writing in the train, so please forgive this joggly writing——"

Then he did not know how to go on, for all that he wanted to say was such as he had never even dreamed of writing—things about his feelings which would look horrible in words; besides, he must not put anything that might not be read by anyone, so what was there to say?

"It has been such a long journey," he wrote at last, "away from the Tyrol"; (he did not dare even to put "from you,") "I though it would never end. But at last it has—very nearly. I have thought a great deal about the Tyrol. It was a lovely time—the loveliest time I have ever had. And now it's over, I try to console myself by thinking of the future, but not the immediate future—*that* is not very enjoyable. I wonder how the mountains are looking to-day. Please give my love to them, especially the lion ones that come and lie out in the moonlight—you will not recognise them from this"—then followed a sketch. "And this is the church we went to, with someone kneeling. And this is meant for the 'English Grundys,' looking at someone who is coming in very late with an alpenstock—only, I am better at the 'English Grundys' than at the person with the alpenstock. I wish I were the 'English Grundys' now, still in the Tyrol. I hope I shall get a letter from you soon; and that it will say you are getting ready to come back. My guardian will be awfully keen for you to come and stay with us. He is not half bad when you know him, and there will be his sister, Mrs. Doone, and her daughter left there after the wedding. It will be simply disgusting if you and Mr. Stormer don't come. I wish I could write all I feel about my lovely time in the Tyrol, but you must please imagine it."

And just as he had not known how to address her, so he could not tell how to subscribe himself, and only put "Mark Lennan."

He posted the letter at Exeter, where he had some time to wait; and his mind moved still more from past to future. Now that he was nearing home he began to think of his sister. In two days she would be gone to Italy; he would not see her again for a long time, and a whole crowd of memories began to stretch out hands to him. How she and he used to walk together in the walled garden, and on the sunk croquet ground; she telling him

stories, her arm round his neck, because she was two years older, and taller than he in those days. Their first talk each holiday, when he came back to her; the first tea—with unlimited jam—in the old mullion-windowed, flower-chintzed schoolroom, just himself and her and old Tingle (Miss Tring, the ancient governess, whose chaperonage would now be gone), and sometimes that kid Sylvia, when she chanced to be staying there with her mother. Cicely had always understood him when he explained to her how inferior school was, because nobody took any interest in beasts or birds except to kill them; or in drawing, or making things, or anything decent. They would go off together, rambling along the river, or up the park, where everything looked so jolly and wild—the ragged oak-trees, and huge boulders, of whose presence old Godden, the coachman, had said: "I can't think but what these ha' been washed here by the Flood, Mast' Mark!" These and a thousand other memories beset his conscience now. And as the train drew closer to their station, he eagerly made ready to jump out and greet her. There was the honeysuckle full out along the paling of the platform over the waiting-room; wonderful, this year—and there was she, standing alone on the platform. No, it was not Cicely! He got out with a blank sensation, as if those memories had played him false. It was a girl, indeed, but she only looked about sixteen, and wore a sunbonnet which hid her hair and half her face. She had on a blue frock, and some honeysuckle in her waist-belt. She seemed to be smiling at him, and expecting him to smile at her; and so he did. She came up to him then, and said:

"I'm Sylvia."

He answered: "Oh! thanks awfully—it was awfully good of you to come and meet me."

"Cicely's so busy. It's only the T-cart. Have you got much luggage?"

She took up his hold-all, and he took it from her; she took his bag, and he took it from her; then they went out to the T-cart. A small groom stood there, holding a silver-roan cob with a black mane and black swish tail.

She said: "D'you mind if I drive, because I'm learning."

And he answered: "Oh, no! rather not."

She got up; he noticed that her eyes looked quite excited. Then his portmanteau came out and was deposited with the other things behind; and he got up beside her.

She said: "Let go, Billy."

The roan rushed past the little groom, whose top boots seemed to twinkle as he jumped up behind. They whizzed round the corner from the station yard, and observing that her mouth was just a little open as though this had disconcerted her, he said:

"He pulls a bit."

"Yes—but isn't he perfectly sweet?"

"He *is* rather decent."

Ah! when *she* came, he would drive her; they would go off alone in the T-cart, and he would show her all the country round.

He was re-awakened by the words:

"Oh! I know he's going to shy!" At once there was a swerve. The roan was cantering.

They had passed a pig.

"Doesn't he look lovely now? Ought I to have whipped him when he shied?"

"Rather not."

"Why?"

"Because horses are horses, and pigs are pigs; it's natural for horses to shy at them."

"Oh!"

He looked up at her then, sidelong. The curve of her cheek and chin looked very soft, and rather jolly.

"I didn't know you, you know!" he said. "You've grown up so awfully."

"I knew you at once. Your voice is still furry."

There was another silence, till she said:

"He does pull, rather—doesn't he, going home?"

"Shall I drive?"

"Yes, please."

He stood up and took the reins, and she slipped past under them in front of him; her hair smelt exactly like hay, as she was softly bumped against him.

She kept regarding him steadily with very blue eyes, now that she was relieved of driving.

"Cicely was afraid you weren't coming," she said suddenly. "What sort of people are those old Stormers?"

He felt himself grow very red, choked something down, and answered:

"It's only he that's old. She's not more than about thirty-five."

"That *is* old."

He restrained the words: "Of course it's old to a kid like you!" And, instead, he looked at her. Was she exactly a kid? She seemed quite tall (for a girl) and not very thin, and there was something frank and soft about her face, and as if she wanted you to be nice to her.

"Is she very pretty?"

This time he did not go red, such was the disturbance that question made in him. If he said: "Yes," it was like letting the world know his adoration; but to say anything less would be horrible, disloyal. So he did say: "Yes," listening hard to the tone of his own voice.

"I thought she was. Do you like her very much?"

Again he struggled with that thing in his throat, and again said: "Yes."

He wanted to hate this girl, yet somehow could not—she looked so soft and confiding. She was staring before her now, her lips still just parted, so evidently *that* had not been because of Bolero's pulling; they were pretty all the same, and so was her short, straight little nose, and her chin, and she was awfully fair. His thoughts flew back to that other face—so splendid, so full of life. Suddenly he found himself unable to picture it—for the first time since he had started on his journey it would not come before him.

"Oh! Look!"

Her hand was pulling at his arm. There in the field over the hedge a buzzard hawk was dropping like a stone.

"Oh, Mark! Oh! It's got it!"

She was covering her face with both her hands, and the hawk, with a young rabbit in its claws, was sailing up again. It looked so beautiful that he did not somehow feel sorry for the rabbit; but he wanted to stroke and comfort her, and said:

"It's all right, Sylvia; it really is. The rabbit's dead already, you know. And it's quite natural."

She took her hands away from a face that looked just as if she was going to cry.

"Poor little rabbit! It was such a little one!"

XII

On the afternoon of the day following he sat in the smoking-room with a prayer-book in his hand, and a frown on his forehead, reading the Marriage Service. The book had been effectively designed for not spoiling the figure when carried in a pocket. But this did not matter, for even if he could have read the words, he would not have known what they meant, seeing that he was thinking how he could make a certain petition to a certain person sitting just behind at a large bureau with a sliding top, examining artificial flies.

He fixed at last upon this form:

"Gordy!" (Why Gordy no one quite knew now—whether because his name was George, or by way of corruption from Guardian.) "When Cis is gone it'll be rather awful, won't it?"

"Not a bit."

Mr. Heatherley was a man of perhaps sixty-four, if indeed guardians have ages, and like a doctor rather than a squire; his face square and puffy, his eyes always half-closed, and his curly mouth using bluntly a voice of that refined coarseness peculiar to people of old family.

"But it will, you know!"

"Well, supposin' it is?"

"I only wondered if you'd mind asking Mr. and Mrs. Stormer to come here for a little—they were awfully kind to me out there."

"Strange man and woman! My dear fellow!"

"Mr. Stormer likes fishing."

"Does he? And what does she like?"

Very grateful that his back was turned, the boy said:

"I don't know—anything—she's awfully nice."

"Ah! Pretty?"

He answered faintly.

"I don't know what *you* call pretty, Gordy."

He felt, rather than saw, his guardian scrutinising him with those half-closed eyes under their gouty lids.

"All right; do as you like. Have 'em here and have done with it, by all means."

Did his heart jump? Not quite; but it felt warm and happy, and he said:

"Thanks awfully, Gordy. It's most frightfully decent of you," and turned again to the Marriage Service. He could make out some of it. In places it seemed to him fine, and in other places queer. About obeying, for instance. If you loved anybody, it seemed rotten to expect them to obey you. If you loved them and they loved you, there couldn't ever be any question of obeying, because you would both do the things always of your own accord. And if they didn't love you, or you them, then—oh! then it would be simply too disgusting for anything, to go on living with a person you didn't love or who didn't love you. But of course *she* didn't love his tutor. Had she once? Those bright doubting eyes, that studiously satiric mouth came very clearly up before him. You could not love them; and yet—he was really very decent. A feeling as of pity, almost of affection, rose in him for his remote tutor. It was queer to feel so, since the last time they had talked together out there, on the terrace, he had not felt at all like that.

The noise of the bureau top sliding down aroused him; Mr. Heatherley was closing in the remains of the artificial flies. That meant he would be going out to fish. And the moment he heard the door shut, Mark sprang up, slid back the bureau top, and began to write his letter. It was hard work.

"Dear Mrs. Stormer,

"My guardian wishes me to beg you and Mr. Stormer to pay us a visit as soon as you come back from the Tyrol. Please tell Mr. Stormer that only the very best fishermen—like him—can catch our trout; the rest catch our trees. This is me catching our trees (here followed a sketch). My sister is going to be married to-morrow, and it will be disgusting afterwards unless you come. So do come, please. And with my very best greetings,

"I am,
"Your humble servant,
"M. Lennan."

When he had stamped this production and dropped it in the letter-box, he had the oddest feeling, as if he had been let out of school; a desire to rush about, to frolic. What should he do? Cis, of course, would be busy—they were all busy about the

wedding. He would go and saddle Bolero, and jump him in the park; or should he go down along the river and watch the jays? Both seemed lonely occupations. And he stood in the window—dejected. At the age of five, walking with his nurse, he had been overheard remarking: "Nurse, I want to eat a biscuit—*all the way* I want to eat a biscuit!" and it was still rather so with him perhaps—all the way he wanted to eat a biscuit. He bethought him then of his modelling, and went out to the little empty greenhouse where he kept his masterpieces. They seemed to him now quite horrible—and two of them, the sheep and the turkey, he marked out for summary destruction. The idea occurred to him that he might try and model that hawk escaping with the little rabbit; but when he tried, no nice feeling came, and flinging the things down he went out. He ran along the unweeded path to the tennis ground —lawn tennis was then just coming in. The grass looked very rough. But then, everything about that little manor-house was left rather wild and anyhow; why, nobody quite knew, and nobody seemed to mind. He stood there scrutinising the condition of the ground. A sound of humming came to his ears. He got up on the wall. There was Sylvia sitting in the field, making a wreath of honeysuckle. He stood very quiet and listened. She looked pretty—lost in her tune. Then he slid down off the wall, and said gently:

"Hallo!"

She looked round at him, her eyes very wide open.

"Your voice is jolly, Sylvia!"

"Oh, no!"

"It is. Come and climb a tree!"

"Where?"

"In the park, of course."

They were some time selecting the tree, many being too easy for him, and many too hard for her; but one was found at last, an oak of great age, and frequented by rooks. Then, insisting that she must be roped to him, he departed to the house for some blind-cord. The climb began at four o'clock—named by him the ascent of the Cimone della Pala. He led the momentous expedition, taking a hitch of the blind-cord round a branch before he permitted her to move. Two or three times he was obliged to make the cord fast and return to help her, for she was not an "expert"; her arms seemed soft, and she was inclined to straddle instead of trusting to one foot. But

at last they were settled, streaked indeed with moss, on the top branch but two. They rested there, silent, listening to the rooks soothing an outraged dignity. Save for this slowly subsiding demonstration it was marvellously peaceful and remote up there, half-way to a blue sky thinly veiled from them by the crinkled brown-green leaves. The peculiar dry mossy smell of an oak-tree was disturbed into the air by the least motion of their feet or hands against the bark. They could hardly see the ground, and all around, other gnarled trees barred off any view.

He said:

"If we stay up here till it's dark we might see owls."

"Oh, no! Owls are horrible!"

"What! They're *lovely*—especially white owls."

"I can't stand their eyes, and they squeak so when they're hunting."

"Oh! but that's so jolly, and their eyes are beautiful."

"They're always catching mice and little chickens; all sorts of little things."

"But they don't mean to; they only want them to eat. Don't you think things are jolliest at night?"

She slipped her arm in his.

"No; I don't like the dark."

"Why not? It's splendid—when things get mysterious." He dwelt lovingly on that word.

"I don't like mysterious things. They frighten you."

"Oh, Sylvia!"

"No, I like early morning—especially in spring, when it's beginning to get leafy."

"Well, of course."

She was leaning against him, for safety, just a little; and stretching out his arm, he took good hold of the branch to make a back for her. There was a silence. Then he said:

"If you could only have one tree, which would you have?"

"Not oaks. Limes—no—birches. Which would you?"

He pondered. So many trees were perfect. Birches and limes, of course; but beeches and cypresses, and yews, and cedars, and holm-oaks—almost, and plane-trees; then he said suddenly:

"Pines; I mean the big ones with reddish stems and branches pretty high up."

"Why?"

Again he pondered. It was very important to explain exactly

why; his feelings about everything were concerned in this. And while he mused she gazed at him, as if surprised to see anyone think so deeply. At last he said:

"Because they're independent and dignified and never quite cold, and their branches seem to brood, but chiefly because those I mean are generally out of the common where you find them. You know—just one or two, strong and dark, standing out against the sky."

"They're *too* dark."

It occurred to him suddenly that he had forgotten larches. They, of course, could be heavenly, when you lay under them and looked up at the sky, as he had that afternoon out there. Then he heard her say:

"If I could only have one flower, I should have lilies of the valley, the small ones that grow wild and smell so jolly."

He had a swift vision of another flower, dark—very different, and was silent.

"What would you have, Mark?" Her voice sounded a little hurt. "You *are* thinking of one, aren't you?"

He said honestly:

"Yes, I am."

"Which?"

"It's dark, too; you wouldn't care for it a bit."

"How d'you know?"

"A clove carnation."

"But I do like it—only—not very much."

He nodded solemnly.

"I knew you wouldn't."

Then a silence fell between them. She had ceased to lean against him, and he missed the cosy friendliness of it. Now that their voices and the cawings of the rooks had ceased, there was nothing heard but the dry rustle of the leaves, and the plaintive cry of a buzzard hawk hunting over the little tor across the river. There were nearly always two up there, quartering the sky. To the boy the silence was lovely—like Nature talking to you—Nature always talked in silences. The beasts, the birds, the insects, only really showed themselves when you were still; you had to be awfully quiet, too, for flowers and plants, otherwise you couldn't see the real jolly separate life there was in them. Even the boulders down there, that old Godden thought had been washed up by the Flood, never showed you what queer

shapes they had, and let you feel close to them, unless you were thinking of nothing else. Sylvia, after all, was better in that way than he had expected. She could keep quiet (he had thought girls hopeless); she was gentle, and it was rather jolly to watch her. Through the leaves came the faint far tinkle of the tea-bell.

She said: "We must get down."

It was much too jolly to go in, really. But if she wanted her tea—girls always wanted tea! And, twisting the cord carefully round the branch, he began to superintend her descent. About to follow, he heard her cry:

"Oh, Mark! I'm stuck—I'm stuck! I can't reach it with my foot! I'm swinging!" And he saw that she *was* swinging by her hands and the cord.

"Let go; drop on to the branch below—the cord'll hold you straight till you grab the trunk."

Her voice mounted piteously:

"I can't—I really can't—I should slip!"

He tied the cord, and slithered hastily to the branch below her; then, bracing himself against the trunk he clutched her round the waist and knees; but the taut cord held her up, and she would not come to anchor. He could not hold her and untie the cord, which was fast round her waist. If he let her go with one hand, and got out his knife, he would never be able to cut and hold her at the same time. For a moment he thought he had better climb up again and slack off the cord, but he could see by her face that she was getting frightened; he could feel it by the quivering of her body.

"If I heave you up," he said, "can you get hold again above?" And, without waiting for an answer, he heaved. She caught hold frantically.

"Hold on just for a second."

She did not answer, but he saw that her face had gone very white. He snatched out his knife and cut the cord. She clung just for that moment, then came loose into his arms, and he hauled her to him against the trunk. Safe there, she buried her face on his shoulder. He began to murmur to her and smooth her softly, with quite a feeling of its being his business to comfort her like this, to protect her. He knew she was crying, but she let no sound escape, and he was very careful not to show that he knew, for fear she should feel ashamed. He wondered if he ought to kiss her. At last he did, on the top

of her head, very gently. Then she put up her face and said she was a beast. And he kissed her again on an eyebrow.

After that she seemed all right, and very gingerly they descended to the ground, where shadows were beginning to lengthen over the fern and the sun to slant into their eyes.

XIII

The night after Cicely's wedding the boy stood at the window of his pleasant attic bedroom, with one wall sloping, and its faint smell of mice. He was tired and excited, and his brain full of pictures. This was his first wedding, and he was haunted by a vision of his sister's little white form, and her face with its starry eyes. She was gone—his no more! How fearful the Wedding March had sounded on that organ—that awful old wheezer; and the sermon! One didn't want to hear that sort of thing when one felt inclined to cry. Even Gordy had looked rather boiled when he was giving her away. With perfect distinctness he could still see the group before the altar rails, just as if he had not been a part of it himself. Cis in her white, Sylvia in fluffy grey; his impassive brother-in-law's tall figure; Gordy looking queer in a black coat, with a very yellow face, and eyes still half-closed. The rotten part of it all had been that you wanted to be just *feeling*, and you had to be thinking of the ring, and your gloves, and whether the lowest button of your white waistcoat was properly undone. Girls could do both, it seemed—Cis seemed to be seeing something wonderful all the time, and Sylvia had looked quite holy. He himself had been too conscious of the rector's voice, and the sort of professional manner with which he did it all, as if he were making up a prescription, with directions how to take it. And yet it was all rather beautiful in a kind of fashion, every face turned one way, and a tremendous hush—except for poor old Godden's blowing of his nose with his enormous red handkerchief; and the soft darkness up in the roof, and down in the pews; and the sunlight brightening the south windows. All the same, it would have been much jollier just taking hands by themselves somewhere, and saying out before God what they really felt—because, after all, God was everything, everywhere, not only in stuffy churches. That was how *he* would like to be married, out of doors on a starry night like this, when everything felt wonderful all round you. Surely God wasn't half as small as people seemed always making Him—a sort of superior man a little bigger than themselves! Even the very most beautiful and wonderful and awful things one could imagine or make, could only be just nothing

to a God who had a temple like the night out there. But then you couldn't be married alone, and no girl would ever like to be married without rings and flowers and dresses, and words that made it all feel small and cosy! Cis might have, perhaps, only she wouldn't, because of not hurting other people's feelings; but Sylvia—never—she would be afraid. Only, of course, she was young! And the thread of his thoughts broke—and scattered like beads from a string.

Leaning out, and resting his chin on his hands, he drew the night air into his lungs. Honeysuckle, or was it the scent of lilies still? The stars all out, and lots of owls to-night—four at least. What would night be like without owls and stars? But that was it—you never could think what things would be like if they weren't just what and where they were. You never knew what was coming, either; and yet, when it came, it seemed as if nothing else ever could have come. That was queer—you could do anything you liked until you'd done it, but when you *had* done it, then you knew, of course, that you must always have had to . . . What was that light, below and to the left? Whose room? Old Tingle's—no, the little spare room—Sylvia's! She must be awake, then! He leaned far out, and whispered in the voice she had said was still furry:

"Sylvia!"

The light flickered, he could just see her head appear, with hair all loose, and her face turning up to him. He could only half see, half imagine it, mysterious, blurry; and he whispered:

"Isn't this jolly?"

The whisper travelled back:

"Awfully."

"Aren't you sleepy?"

"No; are you?"

"Not a bit. D'you hear the owls?"

"Rather."

"Doesn't it smell good?"

"Perfect. Can you see me?"

"Only just, not too much. Can you?"

"I can't see your nose. Shall I get the candle?"

"No—that'd spoil it. What are you sitting on?"

"The window sill."

"It doesn't twist your neck, does it?"

"No—o—only a little bit."

"Are you hungry?"

"Yes."

"Wait half a shake. I'll let down some chocolate in my big bath towel; it'll swing along to you—reach out."

A dim white arm reached out.

"Catch! I say, you won't get cold?"

"Rather not."

"It's too jolly to sleep, isn't it?"

"Mark!"

"Yes."

"Which star is yours? Mine is the white one over the top branch of the big sycamore, from here."

"Mine is that twinkling red one over the summer house, Sylvia!"

"Yes."

"Catch!"

"Oh! I couldn't—what was it?"

"Nothing."

"No, but what *was* it?"

"Only my star. It's caught in your hair."

"Oh!"

"Listen!"

Silence, then, until her awed whisper:

"What?"

And his floating down, dying away:

"*Cave!*"

What had stirred—some window opened? Cautiously he spied along the face of the dim house. There was no light anywhere, nor any shifting blurr of white at her window below. All was dark, remote—still sweet with the scent of something jolly. And then he saw what that something was. All over the wall below his window white jessamine was in flower—stars, not only in the sky. Perhaps the sky was really a field of white flowers; and God walked there, and plucked the stars. . . .

The next morning there was a letter on his plate when he came down to breakfast. He couldn't open it with Sylvia on one side of him, and old Tingle on the other. Then with a sort of anger he did open it. He need not have been afraid. It was written so that anyone might have read; it told of a climb, of bad weather, said they were coming home. Was he relieved, disturbed, pleased at their coming back, or only uneasily ashamed? She had not got his second letter yet. He could

feel old Tingle looking round at him with those queer sharp twinkling eyes of hers, and Sylvia regarding him quite frankly. And conscious that he was growing red, he said to himself: "I won't!" And did not. In three days they would be at Oxford. Would they come on here at once? Old Tingle was speaking. He heard Sylvia answer: "No, I don't like 'bopsies.' They're so hard!" It was their old name for high cheekbones. Sylvia certainly had none, her cheeks went softly up to her eyes.

"Do you, Mark?"

He said slowly:

"On some people."

"People who have them are strong-willed, aren't they?"

Was *she*—Anna—strong-willed? It came to him that he did not know at all what she was.

When breakfast was over and he had got away to his old greenhouse, he had a strange, unhappy time. He was a beast, he had not been thinking of her half enough! He took the letter out and frowned at it horribly. Why could he not feel more? What was the matter with him? Why was he such a brute—not to be thinking of her day and night? For long he stood disconsolate, in the little dark greenhouse among the images of his beasts, the letter in his hand.

He stole out presently, and got down to the river unobserved. Comforting—that crisp, gentle sound of water; ever so comforting to sit on a stone, very still, and wait for things to happen round you. You lost yourself that way, just became branches, and stones, and water, and birds, and sky. You did not feel such a beast. Gordy would never understand why he did not care for fishing—one thing trying to catch another—instead of watching and understanding what things were. You never got to the end of looking into water, or grass or fern; always something queer and new. It was like that, too, with yourself, if you sat down and looked properly—most awfully interesting to see things working in your mind.

A soft rain had begun to fall, hissing gently on the leaves, but he had still a boy's love of getting wet, and stayed where he was, on the stone. Some people saw fairies in woods and down in water, or said they did; that did not seem to him much fun. What was really interesting was noticing that each thing was different from every other thing, and what made it so; you must see that before you could draw or model decently. It was

fascinating to see your creatures coming out with shapes of their very own; without your understanding how. But this vacation he was no good—couldn't draw or model a bit!

A jay had settled about forty yards away, and remained in full view, attending to his many-coloured feathers. Of all things, birds were the most fascinating! He watched it a long time, and when it flew on, followed it over the high wall up into the park. He heard the lunch-bell ring in the far distance, but did not go in. So long as he was out there in the soft rain with the birds and trees and other creatures, he was free from that unhappy feeling of the morning. He did not go back till nearly seven; properly wet through, and very hungry.

All through dinner he noticed that Sylvia seemed to be watching him, as if wanting to ask him something. She looked very soft in her white frock, open at the neck; and her hair almost the colour of special moonlight, so goldy-pale; and he wanted her to understand that it wasn't a bit because of her that he had been out alone all day. After dinner, when they were getting the table ready to play "red nines," he did murmur:

"Did you sleep last night—after?"

She nodded fervently to that.

It was raining really hard now, swishing and dripping out in the darkness, and he whispered:

"Our stars would be drowned to-night."

"Do you really think we have stars?"

"We might. But mine's safe, of course; your hair *is* jolly, Sylvia."

She gazed at him, very sweet and surprised.

XIV

Anna did not receive the boy's letter in the Tyrol. It followed her to Oxford. She was just going out when it came, and she took it up with the mingled beatitude and almost sickening tremor that a lover feels touching the loved one's letter. She would not open it in the street, but carried it all the way to the garden of a certain College, and sat down to read it under the cedar-tree. That little letter, so short, boyish, and dry, transported her halfway to heaven. She was to see him again at once, not to wait weeks, with the fear that he would quite forget her! Her husband had said at breakfast that Oxford without "the dear young clowns" assuredly was charming, but Oxford "full of tourists and other strange bodies" as certainly was not. Where should they go? Thank heaven, the letter could be shown him! For all that, a little stab of pain went through her that there was not one word which made it unsuitable to show. Still, she was happy. Never had her favourite College garden seemed so beautiful, with each tree and flower so cared for, and the very wind excluded; never had the birds seemed so tame and friendly. The sun shone softly, even the clouds were luminous and joyful. She sat a long time, musing, and went back forgetting all she had come out to do. Having both courage and decision, she did not leave the letter to burn a hole in her corsets, but gave it to her husband at lunch, looking him in the face, and saying carelessly:

"Providence, you see, answers your question."

He read it, raised his eyebrows, smiled, and, without looking up, murmured:

"You wish to prosecute this romantic episode?"

Did he mean anything—or was it simply his way of putting things?

"I naturally want to be anywhere but here."

"Perhaps you would like to go alone?"

He said that, of course, knowing she could not say: Yes. And she answered simply: "No."

"Then let us both go—on Monday. I will catch the young man's trout; thou shalt catch—h'm!—he shall catch—— What is it he catches—trees? Good! That's settled."

And three days later, without another word exchanged on the subject, they started.

Was she grateful to him? No. Afraid of him? No. Scornful of him? Not quite. But she was afraid of *herself,* horribly. How would she ever be able to keep herself in hand, how disguise from these people that she loved their boy? It was her desperate mood that she feared. But since she so much wanted all the best for him that life could give, surely she would have the strength to do nothing that might harm him. Yet she was afraid.

He was there at the station to meet them, in riding things and a nice rough Norfolk jacket that she did not recognise, though she thought she knew his clothes by heart; and as the train came slowly to a standstill the memory of her last moment with him, up in his room amid the luggage she had helped to pack, very nearly overcame her. It seemed so hard to have to meet him coldly, formally, to have to wait—who knew how long—for a minute with him alone! And he was so polite, so beautifully considerate, with all the manners of a host; hoping she wasn't tired, hoping Mr. Stormer had brought his fishing-rod, though they had lots, of course, they could lend him; hoping the weather would be fine; hoping that they wouldn't mind having to drive three miles, and busying himself about their luggage. All this when she just wanted to take him in her arms and push his hair back from his forehead, and look at him!

He did not drive with them—he had thought they would be too crowded—but followed, keeping quite close in the dust to point out the scenery, mounted on a "palfrey," as her husband called the roan with the black swish tail.

This countryside, so rich and yet a little wild, the independent-looking cottages, the old dark cosy manor-house, all was very new to one used to Oxford, and to London, and to little else of England. And all was delightful. Even Mark's guardian seemed to her delightful. For Gordy, when absolutely forced to face an unknown woman, could bring to the encounter a certain bluff ingratiation. His sister, too, Mrs. Doone, with her faded gentleness, seemed soothing.

When Anna was alone in her room, reached by an unexpected little stairway, she stood looking at its carved four-poster bed and the wide lattice window with chintz curtains, and the flowers in a blue bowl. Yes, all was delightful. And yet! What was

it? What had she missed? Ah, she was a fool to fret! It was only his anxiety that they should be comfortable, his fear that he might betray himself. Out there those last few days—his eyes! And now! She brooded earnestly over what dress she should put on. She, who tanned so quickly, had almost lost her sunburn in the week of travelling and Oxford. To-day her eyes looked tired, and she was pale. She was not going to disdain anything that might help. She had reached thirty-six last month, and he would be nineteen to-morrow! She decided on black. In black she knew that her neck looked whiter, and the colour of her eyes and hair stranger. She put on no jewellery, did not even pin a rose at her breast, took white gloves. Since her husband did not come to her room, she went up the little stairway to his. She surprised him ready dressed, standing by the fireplace, smiling faintly. What was he thinking of, standing there with that smile? Was there blood in him at all?

He inclined his head slightly and said:

"Good! Chaste as the night! Black suits you. Shall we find our way down to these savage halls?"

And they went down.

Everyone was already there, waiting. A single neighbouring squire and magistrate, by name Trusham, had been bidden, to make numbers equal.

Dinner was announced; they went in. At the round table in a dining-room, all black oak, with many candles, and terrible portraits of departed ancestors, Anna sat between the magistrate and Gordy. Mark was opposite, between a quaint-looking old lady and a young girl who had not been introduced, a girl in white, with very fair hair and very white skin, blue eyes, and lips a little parted; a daughter evidently of the faded Mrs. Doone. A girl like a silvery moth, like a forget-me-not! Anna found it hard to take her eyes away from this girl's face; not that she admired her exactly; pretty she was—yet; but weak, with those parted lips and soft chin, and almost wistful look, as if her deep-blue half-eager eyes were in spite of her. But she was young—so young! That was why not to watch her seemed impossible. "Sylvia Doone?" Indeed! Yes. A soft name, a pretty name—and very like her! Every time her eyes could travel away from her duty to Squire Trusham, and to Gordy (on both of whom she was clearly making an impression), she gazed at this girl, sitting there by the boy, and whenever

those two young things smiled and spoke together she felt her heart contract and hurt her. Was *this* why that something had gone out of his eyes? Ah, she was foolish! If every girl or woman the boy knew was to cause such a feeling in her, what would life be like? And her will hardened against her fears. She was looking brilliant herself; and she saw that the girl in her turn could not help gazing at her eagerly, wistfully, a little bewildered—hatefully young. And the boy? Slowly, surely, as a magnet draws, Anna could feel that she was drawing him, could see him stealing chances to look at her. Once she surprised him full. What troubled eyes! It was not the old adoring face; yet she knew from its expression that she could make him want her—make him jealous—easily fire him with her kisses, if she would.

And the dinner wore to an end. Then came the moment when the girl and she must meet under the eyes of the mother, and that sharp, quaint-looking old governess. It would be a hard moment, that! And it came—a hard moment and a long one, for Gordy sat full span over his wine. But Anna had not served her time beneath the gaze of upper Oxford for nothing; she managed to be charming, full of interest and questions in her still rather foreign accent. Miss Doone—soon she became Sylvia—must show her all the treasure and antiquities. Was it too dark to go out just to look at the old house by night? Oh, no. Not a bit. There were goloshes in the hall. And they went, the girl leading, and talking of Anna knew not what, so absorbed was she in thinking how for a moment, just a moment, she could contrive to be with the boy alone.

It was not remarkable, this old house, but it was his home—might some day perhaps be his. And houses at night were strangely alive with their window eyes.

"That is my room," the girl said, "where the jessamine is—you can just see it. Mark's is above—look, under where the eave hangs out, away to the left. The other night——"

"Yes; the other night?"

"Oh, I don't——! Listen. That's an owl. We have heaps of owls. Mark likes them. I don't, much."

Always Mark!

"He's awfully keen, you see, about all beasts and birds—he models them. Shall I show you his workshop?—it's an old greenhouse. Here, you can see in."

There through the glass Anna indeed could just see the boy's

quaint creations huddling in the dark on a bare floor, a grotesque company of small monsters. She murmured:

"Yes, I see them, but I won't really look unless he brings me himself."

"Oh, he's sure to. They interest him more than anything in the world."

For all her cautious resolutions Anna could not for the life of her help saying:

"What, more than you?"

The girl gave her a wistful stare before she answered:

"Oh! I don't count much."

Anna laughed, and took her arm. How soft and young it felt! A pang went through her heart, half jealous, half remorseful.

"Do you know," she said, "that you are very sweet?"

The girl did not answer.

"Are you his cousin?"

"No. Gordy is only Mark's uncle by marriage; my mother is Gordy's sister—so I'm nothing."

Nothing!

"I see—just what you English call 'a connection.'"

They were silent, seeming to examine the night; then the girl said:

"I wanted to see you awfully. You're not like what I thought."

"Oh! And what *did* you think?"

"I thought you would have dark eyes, and Venetian red hair, and not be quite so tall. Of course, I haven't any imagination."

They were at the door again when the girl said that, and the hall light was falling on her; her slip of a white figure showed clear. Young—how young she looked! Everything she said—so young!

And Anna murmured: "And you are—more than I thought, too."

Just then the men came out from the dining-room; her husband with the look on his face which denoted he had been well listened to; Squire Trusham laughing as a man does who has no sense of humour; Gordy having a curly, slightly asphyxiated air; and the boy his pale, brooding look, as though he had lost touch with his surroundings. He wavered towards her, seemed to lose himself, went and sat down by the old governess. Was it because

he did not dare to come up to her, or only because he saw the old lady sitting alone? It might well be that.

And the evening, so different from what she had dreamed of, closed in. Squire Trusham was gone in his high dog-cart, with his famous mare whose exploits had entertained her all through dinner. Her candle had been given her; she had said good-night to all but Mark. What should she do when she had his hand in hers? She would be alone with him in that grasp, whose strength no one could see. And she did not know whether to clasp it passionately, or to let it go coolly back to its owner; whether to claim him or to wait. But she was unable to help pressing it feverishly. At once in his face she saw again that troubled look; and her heart smote her. She let it go, and that she might not see him say good-night to the girl, turned and mounted to her room.

Fully dressed, she flung herself on the bed, and there lay, her handkerchief across her mouth, gnawing at its edges.

XV

MARK's nineteenth birthday rose in grey mist, slowly dropped its veil to the grass, and shone clear and glistening. He woke early. From his window he could see nothing in the steep park but the soft blue-grey, balloon-shaped oaks suspended one above the other among the round-topped boulders. It was in early morning that he always got his strongest feeling of wanting to model things; then and after dark, when, for want of light, it was no use. This morning he had the craving badly, and the sense of not knowing how weighed down his spirit. His drawings, his models—they were all so bad, so fumbly. If only this had been his twenty-first birthday, and he had his money, and could do what he liked. He would not stay in England. He would be off to Athens, or Rome, or even to Paris, and work till he *could* do something. And in his holidays he would study animals and birds in wild countries where there were plenty of them, and you could watch them in their haunts. It was stupid having to stay in a place like Oxford; but at the thought of what Oxford meant, his roaming fancy, like a bird hypnotised by a hawk, fluttered, stayed suspended, and dived back to earth. And that feeling of wanting to make things suddenly left him. It was as though he had woken up, his real self; then—lost that self again. Very quietly he made his way downstairs. The garden door was not shuttered, not even locked—it must have been forgotten overnight. Last night! He had never thought he would feel like this when she came—so bewildered, and confused; drawn towards her, but by something held back. And he felt impatient, angry with himself, almost with her. Why could he not be just simply happy, as this morning was happy? He got his field-glasses and searched the meadow that led down to the river. Yet, there were several rabbits out. With the white marguerites and the dew cobwebs, it was all moon-flowery and white; and the rabbits being there made it perfect. He wanted one badly to model from, and for a moment was tempted to get his rook rifle—but what was the good of a dead rabbit—besides, they looked so happy! He put the glasses down and went towards his greenhouse to get a drawing block, thinking to sit on the wall and make a sort of Midsummer Night's Dream

sketch of flowers and rabbits. Someone was there, bending down and doing something to his creatures. Who had the cheek? Why, it was Sylvia—in her dressing-gown! He grew hot, then cold, with anger. He could not bear anyone in that holy place! It was hateful to have his things even looked at; and she—she seemed to be fingering them. He pulled the door open with a jerk, and said: "What are you doing?" He was indeed so stirred by righteous wrath that he hardly noticed the gasp she gave, and the collapse of her figure against the wall. She ran past him, and vanished without a word. He went up to his creatures and saw that she had placed on the head of each one of them a little sprig of jessamine flower. Why! It was idiotic! He could see nothing at first but the ludicrousness of flowers on the heads of his beasts! Then the desperation of this attempt to imagine something graceful, something that would give him pleasure touched him; for he saw now that this was a birthday decoration. From that it was only a second before he was horrified with himself. Poor little Sylvia! What a brute he was! She had plucked all that jessamine, hung out of her window and risked falling to get hold of it; and she had woken up early and come down in her dressing-gown just to do something that she thought he would like! Horrible—what he had done! Now, when it was too late, he saw, only too clearly, her startled white face and quivering lips, and the way she had shrunk against the wall. How pretty she had looked in her dressing-gown with her hair all about her, frightened like that! He would do anything now to make up to her for having been such a perfect beast! The feeling, always a little with him, that he must look after her—dating, no doubt, from days when he had protected her from the bulls that were not there; and the feeling of her being so sweet and decent to him always; and some other feeling too—all these suddenly reached poignant climax. He simply must make it up to her! He ran back into the house and stole upstairs. Outside her room he listened with all his might, but could hear nothing; then tapped softly with one nail, and, putting his mouth to the keyhole, whispered: "Sylvia!" Again and again he whispered her name. He even tried the handle, meaning to open the door an inch, but it was bolted. Once he thought he heard a noise like sobbing, and this made him still more wretched. At last he gave it up; she would not come, would not be consoled. He deserved it, he knew, but it was very hard. And

dreadfully dispirited he went up to his room, took a bit of paper, and tried to write:

"DEAREST SYLVIA,

"It was most awfully sweet of you to put your stars on my beasts. It was just about the most sweet thing you could have done. I am an awful brute, but, of course, if I had only known what you were doing, I should have loved it. Do forgive me; I deserve it, I know—only it *is* my birthday.

"Your sorrowful

"MARK."

He took this down, slipped it under her door, tapped so that she might notice it, and stole away. It relieved his mind a little, and he went downstairs again.

Back in the greenhouse, sitting on a stool, he ruefully contemplated those chapletted beasts. They consisted of a crow, a sheep, a turkey, two doves, a pony, and sundry fragments. She had fastened the jessamine sprigs to the tops of their heads by a tiny daub of wet clay, and had evidently been surprised trying to put a sprig into the mouth of one of the doves, for it hung by a little thread of clay from the beak. He detached it and put it in his buttonhole. Poor little Sylvia! she took things awfully to heart. He would be as nice as ever he could to her all day. And, balancing on his stool, he stared fixedly at the wall against which she had fallen back; the line of her soft chin and throat seemed now to be his only memory. It was very queer how he could see nothing but that, the way the throat moved, swallowed—so white, so soft. And *he* had made it go like that! It seemed an unconscionable time till breakfast.

As the hour approached he haunted the hall, hoping she might be first down. At last he heard footsteps, and waited, hidden behind the door of the empty dining-room, lest at sight of him she should turn back. He had rehearsed what he was going to do—bend down and kiss her hand and say: "Dulcinea del Toboso is the most beautiful lady in the world, and I the most unfortunate knight upon the earth," from his favourite passage out of his favourite book, "Don Quixote." She would surely forgive him then, and his heart would no longer hurt him. Certainly she could never go on making him so miserable if she knew his feelings! She was too soft and gentle for that. Alas! it was not Sylvia who came; but Anna, fresh from sleep,

with her ice-green eyes and bright hair; and in sudden strange antipathy to her, that strong, vivid figure, he stood dumb. And this first lonely moment, which he had so many times in fancy spent locked in her arms, passed without even a kiss; for quickly one by one the others came. But of Sylvia only news through Mrs. Doone that she had a headache, and was staying in bed. Her present was on the sideboard, a book called "Sartor Resartus." "Mark—from Sylvia, August 1st, 1880," together with Gordy's cheque, Mrs. Doone's pearl pin, old Tingle's "Stones of Venice," and one other little parcel wrapped in tissue-paper—four ties of varying shades of green, red, and blue, hand-knitted in silk—a present of how many hours made short by the thought that he would wear the produce of that clicking. He did not fail in outer gratitude, but did he realise what had been knitted into those ties? Not then.

Birthdays, like Christmas days, were made for disenchantment. Always the false gaiety of gaiety arranged—always that pistol to the head: "Confound you! enjoy yourself!" How could he enjoy himself with the thought of Sylvia in her room, made ill by his brutality! The vision of her throat working, swallowing her grief, haunted him like a little white, soft spectre all through the long drive out on to the moor, and the picnic in the heather, and the long drive home—haunted him so that when Anna touched or looked at him he had no spirit to answer, no spirit even to try and be with her alone, but almost a dread of it instead.

And when at last they were at home again, and she whispered: "What is it? What have I done?" he could only mutter: "Nothing! Oh, nothing! It's only that I've been a brute!"

At that enigmatic answer she might well search his face. "Is it my husband?"

He could answer that, at all events.

"Oh, no!"

"What is it, then? Tell me."

They were standing in the inner porch, pretending to examine the ancestral chart—dotted and starred with dolphins and little full-rigged galleons sailing into harbours—which always hung just there.

"Tell me, Mark; I don't like to suffer!"

What could he say, since he did not know himself? He stammered, tried to speak, could not get anything out.

"Is it that girl?"

Startled, he looked away, and said:

"Of course not."

She shivered, and went into the house.

But he stayed, staring at the chart with a dreadful stirred-up feeling—of shame and irritation, pity, impatience, fear, all mixed. What had he done, said, lost? It was that horrid feeling of when one has not been kind and not quite true, yet might have been kinder if one had been still less true. Ah! but it was all so mixed up. It felt all bleak, too, and wintry in him, as if he had suddenly lost everybody's love. Then he was conscious of his tutor.

"Ah! friend Lennan—looking deeply into the past from the less romantic present? Nice things, those old charts. The dolphins are extremely jolly."

It was difficult to remember not to be ill-mannered then. Why did Stormer jeer like that? He just managed to answer:

"Yes, sir; I wish we had some now."

"There are so many moons we wish for, Lennan, and they none of them come tumbling down."

The voice was almost earnest, and the boy's resentment fled. He felt sorry, but why he did not know.

"In the meantime," he heard his tutor say, "let us dress for dinner."

When he came down to the drawing-room, Anna in her moonlight-coloured frock was sitting on the sofa talking to—Sylvia. He kept away from them; they could neither of them want him. But it did seem odd to him, who knew not too much concerning women, that she could be talking so gaily, when only half an hour ago she had said: "Is it that girl?"

He sat next her at dinner. Again it was puzzling that she should be laughing so serenely at Gordy's stories. Did the whispering in the porch, then, mean nothing? And Sylvia would not look at him; he felt sure that she turned her eyes away simply because she knew he was going to look in her direction. And this roused in him a sore feeling—everything that night seemed to rouse that feeling—of injustice; he was cast out, and he could not tell why. He had not meant to hurt either of them! Why should they both want to hurt him so? And presently there came to him a feeling that he did not care: Let them treat him as they liked! There were other things

besides love! If they did not want him—he did not want them! And he hugged this reckless, unhappy don't-care feeling to him with all the abandonment of youth.

But even birthdays come to an end. And moods and feelings which seem so desperately real die in the unreality of sleep.

XVI

If to the boy that birthday was all bewildered disillusionment, to Anna it was verily slow torture; *she* found no relief in thinking that there were things in life other than love. But next morning brought readjustment, a sense of yesterday's extravagance, a renewal of hope. Impossible surely that in one short fortnight she had lost what she had made so sure of! She had only to be resolute. Only to grasp firmly what was hers. After all these empty years was she not to have her hour? To sit still meekly and see it snatched from her by a slip of a soft girl? A thousand times, no! And she watched her chance. She saw him about noon sally forth towards the river, with his rod. She had to wait a little, for Gordy and his bailiff were down there by the tennis lawn, but they soon moved on. She ran out then to the park gate. Once through that she felt safe; her husband, she knew, was working in his room; the girl somewhere invisible; the old governess still at her housekeeping; Mrs. Doone writing letters. She felt full of hope and courage. This old wild tangle of a park, not yet seen, was beautiful—a true trysting-place for fauns and nymphs, with its mossy trees and boulders and the high bracken. She kept along under the wall in the direction of the river, but came to no gate, and began to be afraid she was going wrong. She could hear the river on the other side, and looked for some place where she could climb and see exactly where she was. An old ash-tree tempted her. Scrambling up into its fork, she could just see over. There was the little river within twenty yards, its clear dark water running between thick foliage. On its bank lay a huge stone balanced on another stone still more huge. And with his back to this stone stood the boy, his rod leaning beside him. And there, on the ground, her arms resting on her knees, her chin on her hands, the girl sat looking up. How eager his eyes now—how different from the brooding eyes of yesterday!

"So, you see, that was all. You might forgive me, Sylvia!"

And to Anna it seemed verily as if those two young faces formed suddenly but one—the face of youth.

If she had stayed there looking for all time, she could not have had graven on her heart a vision more indelible. Vision

of Spring, of all that was gone from her for ever! She shrank back out of the fork of the old ash-tree, and, like a stricken beast, went hurrying, stumbling away, amongst the stones and bracken. She ran thus perhaps a quarter of a mile, then threw up her arms, fell down amongst the fern, and lay there on her face. At first her heart hurt her so that she felt nothing but physical pain. If she could have died! But she knew it was nothing but breathlessness. It left her, and that which took its place she tried to drive away by pressing her breast against the ground, by clutching the stalks of the bracken—an ache, an emptiness too dreadful! Youth to youth! He was gone from her—and she was alone again! She did not cry. What good in crying? But gusts of shame kept sweeping through her; shame and rage. So this was all she was worth! The sun struck hot on her back in that lair of tangled fern, where she had fallen; she felt faint and sick. She had not known till now quite what this passion for the boy had meant to her; how much of her very belief in herself was bound up with it; how much clinging to her own youth. What bitterness! One soft slip of a white girl—one *young* thing—and she had become as nothing! But was that true? Could she not even now wrench him back to her with the passion this child knew nothing of! Surely! Oh, surely! Let him but once taste the rapture she could give him! And at this thought she ceased clutching at the bracken stalks, lying still as the very stones around her. Could she not? Might she not, even now? And all feeling, except just a sort of quivering, deserted her—as if she had fallen into a trance. Why spare this girl? Why falter? She was first! He had been hers out there. And she still had the power to draw him. At dinner the first evening she had dragged his gaze to her, away from that girl—away from youth, as a magnet draws steel. She could still bind him with chains that for a little while at all events he would not want to break! Bind him? Hateful word! Take him, hankering after what she could not give him—youth, white innocence, Spring? It would be infamous, infamous! She sprang up from the fern, and ran along the hillside, not looking where she went, stumbling among the tangled growth, in and out of the boulders, till she once more sank breathless on to a stone. It was bare of trees just here, and she could see, across the river valley, the high larch-crowned tor on the far side. The sky was clear—the sun bright. A hawk was wheeling over

that hill; far up, very near the blue! Infamous! She could not do that! Could not drug him, drag him to her by his senses, by all that was least high in him, when she wished for him all the finest things life could give, as if she had been his mother. She could not. It would be wicked! In that moment of intense spiritual agony, those two down there in the sun, by the grey stone and the dark water, seemed guarded from her, protected. The girl's white flower-face trembling up, the boy's gaze leaping down! Strange that a heart so feeling could hate at the same moment that flower-face, and burn to kill with kisses the eagerness in the boy's eyes. The storm in her slowly passed. And she prayed just to feel nothing. It was natural to lose her hour! Natural that her thirst should go unslaked, and her passion never bloom; natural that youth should go to youth, this boy to his own kind, by the law of—love. The breeze blowing down the valley fanned her cheeks, and brought her a faint sensation of relief. Nobility! Was it just a word? Or did those who gave up happiness feel noble?

She wandered for a long time in the park. Not till late afternoon did she again pass out by the gate, through which she had entered, full of hope. She met no one before she reached her room; and there, to be safe, took refuge in her bed. She dreaded only lest the feeling of utter weariness should leave her. She wanted no vigour of mind or body till she was away from here. She meant neither to eat nor drink; only to sleep, if she could. To-morrow, if there were any early train, she could be gone before she need see anyone; her husband must arrange. As to what he would think, and she could say—time enough to decide. And what did it matter? The one vital thing now was not to see the boy, for she could not again go through such hours of struggle. She ran the bell, and sent the startled maid with a message to her husband. And while she waited for him to come, her pride began revolting. She must not let him see. It would be horrible. And slipping out of bed she got a handkerchief and the eau-de-Cologne flash, and bandaged her forehead. He came almost instantly, entering in his quick, noiseless way, and stood looking at her. He did not ask what was the matter, but simply waited. And never before had she realised so completely how he began, as it were, where she left off; began on a plane from which instinct and feeling were as carefully ruled out as though they had been blasphemous. She summoned all her courage, and said: "I

went into the park; the sun must have been too hot. I should like to go home to-morrow, if you don't mind. I can't bear not feeling well in other people's houses."

She was conscious of a smile flickering over his face; then it grew grave.

"Ah!" he said; "yes. The sun, a touch of that will last some days. Will you be fit to travel, though?"

She had a sudden conviction that he knew all about it, but —since to know all about it was to feel himself ridiculous—he had the power of making himself believe that he knew nothing. Was this fine of him, or was it hateful?

She closed her eyes and said:

"My head is bad, but I *shall* be able. Only I don't want a fuss made. Could we go by train before they are down?"

She heard him say:

"Yes. That will have its advantages."

There was not the faintest sound now, but of course he was still there. In that dumb, motionless presence was all her future. Yes, that would be her future—a thing without feeling, and without motion. A fearful curiosity came on her to look at it. She opened her eyes. He was still standing just as he had been, his gaze fixed on her. But one hand, on the edge of his coat pocket—out of the picture, as it were—was nervously closing and unclosing. And suddenly she felt pity. Not for her future—which must be like that; but for him. How dreadful to have grown so that all emotion was exiled—how dreadful! And she said, gently:

"I am sorry, Harold."

As if he had heard something strange and startling, his eyes dilated in a curious way, he buried that nervous hand in his pocket, turned, and went out.

XVII

When young Mark came on Sylvia by the logan-stone it was less surprising to him than if he had not known she was there —having watched her go. She was sitting, all humped together, brooding over the water, her sunbonnet thrown back; and the hair, in which his star had caught, shining faint-gold under the sun. He came on her softly through the grass, and, when he was a little way off, thought it best to halt. If he startled her she might run away, and he would not have the heart to follow. How still she was, lost in her brooding! He wished he could see her face. He spoke at last, gently:

"Sylvia! . . . Would you mind?"

And, seeing that she did not move, he went up to her. Surely she could not still be angry with him!

"Thanks most awfully for that book you gave me—it looks splendid!"

She made no answer. And leaning his rod against the stone, he sighed. Her silence seemed to him unjust; what was it she wanted him to say or do? Life was not worth living, if it was to be all bottled up like this.

"I never meant to hurt you. I hate hurting people. It's only that my beasts are so bad—I can't bear people to see them —especially you—I want to please you—I do really. So, you see, that was all. You *might* forgive me, Sylvia!"

Something over the wall, rustling, a scattering in the fern —deer, no doubt! And again he said eagerly, softly:

"You might be nice to me, Sylvia; you really might."

Very quickly, turning her head away, she said:

"It isn't that any more. It's—it's something else."

"What else?"

"Nothing—only, that I don't count—now——"

He knelt down beside her. What did she mean? But he knew well enough.

"Of course, you count! Most awfully! Oh, don't be unhappy! I hate people being unhappy. Don't be unhappy, Sylvia!" And he began gently to stroke her arm. It was all strange and troubled within him; one thing only plain—he must

not admit anything! As if reading that thought, her blue eyes seemed suddenly to search right into him. Then she pulled some blades of grass, and began plaiting them.

"*She* counts."

Ah! He was not going to say: She doesn't! It would be caddish to say that. Even if she didn't count—— Did she still?—it would be mean and low. And in his eyes just then was the look which had made his tutor compare him to a lion cub in trouble.

Sylvia was touching his arm.

"Mark!"

"Yes."

"Don't!"

He got up and took his rod. What was the use? He could not stay there with her, since he could not—must not speak.

"Are you going?"

"Yes."

"Are you angry? *Please* don't be angry with me."

He felt a choke in his throat, bent down to her hand, and kissed it; then shouldered his rod, and marched away. Looking back once, he saw her still sitting there, gazing after him, forlorn, by that great stone. It seemed to him, then, there was nowhere he could go; nowhere except among the birds and beasts and trees, who did not mind even if you were all mixed up and horrible inside. He lay down in the grass on the bank. He could see the tiny trout moving round and round the stones; swallows came all about him, flying very low; a hornet, too, bore him company for a little. But he could take interest in nothing; it was as if his spirit were in prison. It would have been nice, indeed, to be that water, never staying, passing, passing; or wind, touching everything, never caught. To be able to do nothing without hurting someone—that was what was so ghastly. If only one were like a flower, just springing up, living its life all to itself, and dying. But whatever he did, or said now, would be like telling lies, or else being cruel. The only thing was to keep away from people. And yet how to keep away from his own guests?

He went back to the house for lunch, but both those guests were out, no one seemed quite to know where. Restless, unhappy, puzzled, he wandered round and about all the afternoon. Just before dinner he was told of Mrs. Stormer's not being well, and that they would be leaving to-morrow. Going—after three

days! That plunged him deeper into his strange and sorrowful confusion. He was reduced now to a complete brooding silence. He knew he was attracting attention, but could not help it. Several times during dinner he caught Gordy's eyes fixed on him, from under those puffy half-closed lids, with asphyxiated speculation. But he simply *could* not talk—everything that came into his mind to say seemed false. Ah! it was a sad evening—with its glimmering vision into another's sore heart, its confused gnawing sense of things broken, faith betrayed; and yet always the perplexed wonder—'How could I have helped it?' And always Sylvia's wistful face that he tried not to look at.

He stole out, leaving Gordy and his tutor still over their wine, and roamed about the garden a long time, listening sadly to the owls. It was a blessing to get upstairs, though of course he would not sleep.

But he did sleep, all through a night of many dreams, in the last of which he was lying on a mountainside. Anna looking down into his eyes, and bending her face to his. He woke just as her lips touched him. Still under the spell of that troubling dream, he became conscious of the sound of wheels and horses' hoofs on the gravel, and sprang out of bed. There was the waggonette moving from the door, old Godden driving, luggage piled up beside him, and the Stormers sitting opposite each other in the carriage. Going away like that—having never even said good-bye! For a moment he felt as people must when they have unwittingly killed someone—utterly stunned and miserable. Then he dashed into his clothes. He would not let her go thus! He would—he must—see her again! What had he done that she should go like this? He rushed downstairs. The hall was empty; nineteen minutes to eight! The train left at eight o'clock. Had he time to saddle Bolero? He rushed round to the stables; but the cob was out, being shoed. He would—he must get there in time. It would show her anyway that he was not quite a cad. He walked till the drive curved, then began running hard. A quarter of a mile, and already he felt better, not so miserable and guilty; it was something to feel you had a tough job in hand, all your work cut out—something to have to think of economising strength, picking out the best going, keeping out of the sun, saving your wind uphill, flying down any slope. It was cool still, and the dew had laid the dust; there was no traffic and scarcely anyone

to look back and gape as he ran by. What he would do, if he got there in time—how explain this mad three-mile run—he did not think. He passed a farm which he knew was just half-way. He had left his watch. Indeed, he had put on only his trousers, shirt, and Norfolk jacket; no tie, no hat, not even socks under his tennis shoes, and he was as hot as fire, with his hair flying back—a strange young creature indeed for anyone to meet. But he had lost now all feeling, save the will to get there. A flock of sheep came out of a field into the lane. He pushed through them somehow, but they lost him several seconds. More than a mile still; and he was blown and his legs beginning to give! Downhill indeed they went of their own accord, but there was the long run-in, quite level; and he could hear the train, now slowly puffing its way along the valley. Then, in spite of exhaustion, his spirit rose. He would not go in looking like a scarecrow, utterly done, and make a scene. He must pull himself together at the end, and stroll in—as if he had come for fun. But how—seeing that at any moment he felt he might fall flat in the dust, and stay there for ever! And, as he ran, he made little desperate efforts to mop his face, and brush his clothes. There were the gates, at last—two hundred yards away. The train he could hear no longer. It must be standing in the station. And a sob came from his overdriven lungs. He heard the guard's whistle as he reached the gates. Instead of making for the booking-office, he ran along the paling, where an entrance to the goods-shed was open, and dashing through he fell back against the honeysuckle. The engine was just abreast of him; he snatched at his sleeve and passed it over his face, to wipe the sweat away. Everything was blurred. He must see—surely he had not come in time just not to see! He pushed his hands over his forehead and hair, and spied up dizzily at the slowly passing train. She was there, at a window! Standing, looking out! He dared not step forward, for fear of falling, but he put out his hand. She saw him. Yes, she saw him! Wasn't she going to make a sign? Not one? And suddenly he saw her tear at her dress, pluck something out, and throw it. It fell close to his feet. He did not pick it up—he wanted to see her face till she was gone. It looked wonderful—very proud, and pale. She put her hands up to her lips. Then everything went blurred again, and when he could see once more, the train had vanished. But at his feet was what she had thrown. He picked it up! All dry and dark, it was the flower

she had given him in the Tyrol, and stolen back from his buttonhole.

Creeping out, past the goods-shed, he made his way to a field, and lay down with his face pressed to that withered thing which still had its scent. . . .

The asphyxiated speculation in his guardian's eyes had not been without significance. Mark did not go back to Oxford. He went instead to Rome—to live in his sister's house, and attend a school of sculpture. That was the beginning of a time when nothing counted except his work.

To Anna he wrote twice, but received no answer. From his tutor he had one little note:

"My Dear Lennan,

"So! You abandon us for Art? Ah! well—it was your moon, if I remember—one of them. A worthy moon—a little dusty in these days—a little in her decline—but to you no doubt a virgin goddess, whose hem, etc.

"We shall retain the friendliest memories of you in spite of your defection.

"Once your tutor and still your friend,

"Harold Stormer."

After that vacation it was long—very long before he saw Sylvia again.

PART II

SUMMER

I

Gleam of a thousand lights; clack and mutter of innumerable voices, laughter, footsteps; hiss and rumble of passing trains taking gamblers back to Nice or Mentone; fevered wailing from the violins of four fiddlers with dark-white skins outside the café; and above, around, beyond, the dark sky, and the dark mountains, and the dark sea, like some great dark flower to whose heart is clinging a jewelled beetle. So was Monte Carlo on that May night of 1887.

But Mark Lennan, at one of the little marble-topped tables, was in too great maze and exaltation of spirit and of senses to be conscious of its glare and babel, even of its beauty. He sat so very still that his neighbours, with the instinctive aversion of the human creature to what is too remote from its own mood, after one good stare, turned their eyes away, as from something ludicrous, almost offensive.

He was lost, indeed, in memory of the minutes just gone by. For it had come at last, after all these weeks of ferment, after all this strange time of perturbation.

Very stealthily it had been creeping on him, ever since that chance introduction nearly a year ago, soon after he settled down in London, following his six years in Rome and Paris. First the merest friendliness, because she was so nice about his work; then respectful admiration, because she was so beautiful; then pity, because she was so unhappy in her marriage. If she had been happy, he would have fled. The knowledge that she had been unhappy long before he knew her had kept his conscience quiet. And at last one afternoon she said: "Ah! if you come out there too!" Marvellously subtle, the way that one little outslipped saying had worked in him, as though it had a life of its own—like a strange bird flown into the garden of his heart, and established with its new song and flutterings, its new flight, its wistful and ever clearer call. That and one

moment, a few days later in her London drawing-room, when he had told her that he *was* coming, and she did not, could not, he felt, look at him. Queer! nothing momentous—and yet it had altered all the future!

And so she had gone with her uncle and aunt, under whose wing one might be sure she would meet with no wayward or exotic happenings. And he had received from her this little letter:

"Hôtel Cœur d'Or,
"Monte Carlo.

"My dear Mark,

"We've arrived. It is so good to be in the sun. The flowers are wonderful. I am keeping Gorbio and Roquebrune till you come.

"Your friend,
"Olive Cramier."

That letter was the single clear memory he had of the time between her going and his following. He received it one afternoon, sitting on an old low garden wall with the spring sun shining on him through apple-trees in blossom, and a feeling as if all the desire of the world lay before him, and he had but to stretch out his arms to take it.

Then confused unrest, all things vague; till at the end of his journey he stepped out of the train at Beaulieu with a furiously beating heart. But why? Surely he had not expected her to come out from Monte Carlo to meet him!

A week had gone by since then in one long effort to be with her and appear to others as though he did not greatly wish to be; two concerts, two walks with her alone, when all that he had said seemed as nothing said, and all her sayings but ghosts of what he wished to hear; a week of confusion, day and night, until, a few minutes ago, her handkerchief had fallen from her glove on to the dusty road, and he had picked it up and put it to his lips. Nothing could take away the look she had given him then. Nothing could ever again separate her from him utterly. She had confessed in it to the same sweet, fearful trouble that he himself was feeling. She had not spoken, but he had seen her lips part, her breast rise and fall. And *he* had not spoken. What was the use of words?

He felt in the pocket of his coat. There, against his fingers,

was that wisp of lawn and lace, soft, yet somehow alive; and stealthily he took it out. The whole of her, with her fragrance, seemed pressed to his face in the touch of that lawn border, roughened by little white stars. More secretly than ever he put it back; and for the first time looked round. These people! They belonged to a world that he had left. They gave him the same feeling that her uncle and aunt had given him just now, when they said good-night, following her into their hotel. That good Colonel, that good Mrs. Ercott! The very concretion of the world he had been brought up in, of the English point of view; symbolic figures of health, reason, and the straight path, on which at that moment, seemingly, he had turned his back. The Colonel's profile, ruddy through its tan, with grey moustache guiltless of any wax, his cheery, high-pitched: "Good-night, young Lennan!" His wife's curly smile, her flat, cosy, confidential voice—how strange and remote they had suddenly become! And all these people here, chattering, drinking—how queer and far away! Or was it just that he was queer and remote to them?

And getting up from his table, he passed the fiddlers with the dark-white skins, out into the *Place*.

II

He went up the side streets to the back of her hotel, and stood by the railings of the garden—one of those hotel gardens which exist but to figure in advertisements, with its few arid palms, its paths staring white between them, and a fringe of dusty lilacs and mimosas.

And there came to him the oddest feeling—that he had been there before, peering through blossoms at those staring paths and shuttered windows. A scent of wood-smoke was abroad, and some dry plant rustled ever so faintly in what little wind was stirring. What was there of memory in this night, this garden? Some dark sweet thing, invisible, to feel whose presence was at once ecstasy, and the irritation of a thirst that will not be quenched.

And he walked on. Houses, houses! At last he was away from them, alone on the high road, beyond the limits of Monaco. And walking thus through the night he had thoughts that he imagined no one had ever had before him. The knowledge that she loved him had made everything seem very sacred and responsible. Whatever he did, he must not harm her. Women were so helpless!

For in spite of six years of art in Rome and Paris, he still had a fastidious reverence for women. If she had loved her husband she would have been safe enough from him; but to be bound to a companionship that she gave unwillingly—this had seemed to him atrocious, even before he loved her. How could any husband ask that? Have so little pride—so little pity? The unpardonable thing! What was there to respect in such a marriage? Only, he must not do her harm! But now that her eyes had said, I love you!—What then? It was simply miraculous to know *that,* under the stars of this warm Southern night, burning its incense of trees and flowers!

Climbing up above the road, he lay down. If only she were there beside him! The fragrance of the earth, not yet chilled, crept to his face; and for just a moment it seemed to him that she did come. If he could keep her there for ever in the embrace that was no embrace—in ghostly rapture, on this wild fragrant bed no lovers before had ever pressed, save the creeping

things, and the flowers; save sunlight and moonlight with their shadows; and the wind kissing the earth! . . .

Then she was gone; his hands touched nothing but the crumbled pine dust, and the flowers of the wild thyme fallen into sleep.

He stood on the edge of the little cliff, above the road between the dark mountains and the sea black with depth. Too late for any passer-by; as far from what men thought and said and did as the very night itself with its whispering warmth. And he conjured up her face, making certain of it—the eyes, clear and brown, and wide apart; the close, sweet mouth; the dark hair; the whole flying loveliness.

Then he leaped down into the road, and ran—one could not walk, feeling this miracle, that no one had ever felt before, the miracle of love.

III

In their most reputable hotel "Le Cœur d'Or," long since remodelled and renamed, Mrs. Ercott lay in her brass-bound bed looking by starlight at the Colonel in his brass-bound bed. Her ears were carefully freed from the pressure of her pillow, for she thought she heard a mosquito. Companion for thirty years to one whose life had been feverishly punctuated by the attentions of those little beasts, she had no love for them. It was the one subject on which perhaps her imagination was stronger than her common sense. For in fact there was not, and could not be, a mosquito, since the first thing the Colonel did, on arriving at any place farther South than Parallel 46 of latitude was to open the windows very wide, and nail with many tiny tacks a piece of mosquito netting across that refreshing space, while she held him firmly by the coat-tails. The fact that other people did not so secure their windows did not at all trouble the Colonel, a true Englishman, who loved to act in his own way, and to think in the ways of other people. After that they would wait till night came, then burn a peculiar little lamp with a peculiar little smell, and, in the full glare of the gaslight, stand about on chairs, with slippers, and their eyes fixed on true or imaginary beasts. Then would fall little slaps, making little messes, and little joyous or doleful cries would arise: "I've got that one!" "Oh, John, I missed him!" And in the middle of the room, the Colonel in pyjamas, and spectacles (only worn in very solemn moments, low down on his nose), would revolve slowly, turning his eyes, with that look in them of outfacing death which he had so long acquired, on every inch of wall and ceiling, till at last he would say: "Well, Dolly, that's the lot!" At which she would say: "Give me a kiss, dear!" and he would kiss her, and get into his bed.

There was, then, no mosquito, save the general ghost of it which lingered in the mind of one devoted to her husband. Spying out his profile, for he was lying on his back, she refrained from saying: "John, are you awake?" A whiffling sound was coming from a nose, to which—originally straight—attention to military duties had given a slight crook, half an inch below the level of grizzled eyebrows raised a little, as

though surprised at the sounds beneath. She could hardly see him, but she thought: 'How good he looks!' And, in fact, he did. It was the face of a man incapable of evil, having in its sleep the candour of one at heart a child—the simple candour of those who have never known how to seek adventures of the mind, and have always sought adventures of the body. Then somehow she did say:

"John! Are you asleep?"

The Colonel, instantly alive, as at some old-time attack, answered:

"Yes."

"That poor young man!"

"Which?"

"Mark Lennan. Haven't you seen?"

"What?"

"My dear, it was under your nose. But you never do see these things!"

The Colonel slowly turned his head. His wife was an imaginative woman! She had always been so. Dimly he perceived that something romantic was about to come from her. But with the almost professional gentleness of a man who has cut the heads and arms off people in his time, he answered:

"What things?"

"He picked up her handkerchief."

"Whose?"

"Olive's. He put it in his pocket. I distinctly saw him."

There was silence; then Mrs. Ercott's voice rose again, impersonal, far away.

"What always astonishes me about young people is the way they think they're not seen—poor dears!"

Still there was silence.

"John! Are you thinking?"

For a considerable sound of breathing, not mere whiffling now, was coming from the Colonel—to his wife a sure sign.

And indeed he *was* thinking. Dolly was an imaginative woman, but something told him that in this case she might not be riding past the hounds.

Mrs. Ercott raised herself. He looked more good than ever; a little perplexed frown had climbed up with his eyebrows and got caught in the wrinkles across his forehead.

"I'm very fond of Olive," he said.

Mrs. Ercott fell back on her pillows. In her heart there was

just the little soreness natural to a woman over fifty, whose husband has a niece.

"No doubt," she murmured.

Something vague moved deep down in the Colonel; he stretched out his hand. In that strip of gloom between the beds it encountered another hand, which squeezed it rather hard.

He said: "Look here, old girl!" and there was silence.

Mrs. Ercott in her turn was thinking. Her thoughts were flat and rapid like her voice, but had a sort of sentiment such as accompanies the mental exercise of women with good hearts. Poor young man! And poor Olive! But was a woman ever to be pitied, when she was so pretty! Besides, all said and done, she had a fine-looking man for husband; in Parliament, with a career, and fond of her—decidedly. And their little house in London, so close to Westminster, was a distinct dear; nor could anything be more charming than their cottage by the river. Was Olive, then, to be pitied? And yet—she was not happy. No good pretending that she was happy. All very well to say that such things were within one's control, but if you read novels at all, you knew they weren't. There was such a thing as incompatibility. Oh yes! And there was the matter of difference in their ages! Olive was twenty-six, Robert Cramier forty-two. And now this young Mark Lennan was in love with her. What if she were in love with him! John would realise then, perhaps, that the young flew to the young. For men—even the best, like John, were funny! She would never dream of feeling for any of her nephews as John clearly felt for Olive.

The Colonel's voice broke in on her thoughts.

"Nice young fellow—Lennan! Great pity! Better sheer off—if he's getting——"

And, rather suddenly, she answered:

"Suppose he can't!"

"Can't?"

"Did you never hear of a '*grande passion*'?"

The Colonel rose on his elbow. This was another of those occasions showing him how, during the later years of his service in Madras and Upper Burmah, when Dolly's health had not been equal to the heat, she had picked up in London a queer way of looking at things—as if they were not—not so right or wrong as —as he felt them to be. And he repeated those two French words in his own way, adding:

"Isn't that just what I'm saying? The sooner he stands clear, the better."

But Mrs. Ercott, too, sat up.

"Be human," she said.

The Colonel experienced the same sensation as when one suddenly knows that one is not digesting food. Because young Lennan was in danger of getting into a dishonourable fix, he was told to be human! Really, Dolly——! The white blur of her new boudoir cap suddenly impinged on his consciousness. Surely she was not getting—unEnglish! At her time of life!

"I'm thinking of Olive," he said; "I don't want her worried with that sort of thing."

"Perhaps Olive can manage for herself. In these days it doesn't do to interfere with love."

"Love!" muttered the Colonel. "Phew!"

If one's own wife called this—this sort of—thing, love—then, why had he been faithful to her—in very hot climates—all these years? A sense of waste, and of injustice, tried to rear its head against all the side of him which attached certain meanings to certain words, and acted up to them. And this revolt gave him a feeling, strange and so unpleasant. Love! It was not a word to use thus loosely! Love led to marriage; this could not lead to marriage, except through—the Divorce Court. And suddenly the Colonel had a vision of his dead brother, Lindsay, Olive's father, standing there in the dark, with his grave, clear-cut, ivory-pale face, under the black hair supposed to be derived from a French ancestress who had escaped from the massacre of St. Bartholomew. Upright fellow always, Lindsay—even before he was made bishop! Queer somehow that Olive should be his daughter. Not that she was not upright; not at all! But she was soft! Lindsey was not! Imagine him seeing young Lennan putting her handkerchief in his pocket. But had the young man really done such a thing? Dolly was imaginative! He had mistaken it probably for his own; if he had chanced to blow his nose, he would have realised. For, coupled with the almost child-like candour of his mind, the Colonel had real administrative vigour, a true sense of practical values; an ounce of illustration was always worth to him a pound of theory! Dolly was given to riding off on theories. Thank God! she never acted on 'em!

He said gently:

"My dear! Young Lennan may be an artist and all that,

but he's a gentleman! I know old Heatherley, his guardian. Why I introduced him to Olive myself!"

"What has that to do with it? He's in love with her."

One of the countless legion who hold a creed taken at face value, into the roots and reasons of which they have never dreamed of going, the Colonel was staggered. Like some native on an island surrounded by troubled seas, at which he has stared with a certain contemptuous awe all his life, but never entered, he was disconcerted when thus asked to leave the shore. And by his own wife!

Indeed, Mrs. Ercott had not intended to go so far; but there was in her, as in all women whose minds are more active than their husband's, a something worrying her always to go a little farther than she meant. With real compunction she heard the Colonel say:

"I must get up and drink some water."

She was out of bed in a moment. "Not without boiling!"

She had seriously troubled him, then! Now he would not sleep—the blood went to his head so quickly. He would just lie awake, trying not to disturb her. She could not bear him not to disturb her. It seemed so selfish! She ought to have known that the whole subject was too dangerous to discuss at night.

She became conscious that he was standing just behind her; his figure in its thin covering looked lean, his face worn.

"I'm sorry you put that idea into my head!" he said. "I'm fond of Olive."

Again Mrs. Ercott felt that jealous twinge, soon lost this time in the motherliness of a childless woman for her husband. He must not be troubled! He should not be troubled. And she said:

"The water's boiling! Now sip a good glass slowly, and get into bed, or I'll take your temperature!"

Obediently the Colonel took from her the glass, and as he sipped, she put her hand up and stroked his head.

where his old friend the Rajah—precious old rascal!—had gardens to his palace rather like these. He paced again to the front. Nice and quiet in the early mornings, with the sea down there, and nobody trying to get the better of anybody else. There were fellows never happy unless they were doing someone in the eye. He had known men, who would ride at the devil himself, make it a point of honour to swindle a friend out of a few pounds! Odd place this "Monte"—sort of a Garden of Eden gone wrong. And all the real, but quite inarticulate love of Nature, which had supported the Colonel through deserts and jungles, on transports at sea, and in mountain camps, awoke in the sweetness of these gardens. His dear mother! He had never forgotten the words with which she had shown him the sunset through the coppice down at old Withes Norton, when he was nine years old: "That is beauty, Jack! Do you feel it, darling?" He had not felt it at the time—not he; a thick-headed, scampering youngster. Even when he first went to India he had had no eye for a sunset. The rising generation were different. That young couple, for instance, under the pepper-tree, sitting there without a word, just looking at the trees. How long, he wondered, had they been sitting like that? And suddenly something in the Colonel leaped; his steel-coloured eyes took on their look of outfacing death. Choking down a cough, he faced about, back to where he had stood above the pigeon-shooting ground. . . . Olive and that young fellow! An assignation! At this time in the morning! The earth reeled. His brother's child—his favourite niece! The woman whom he most admired—the woman for whom his heart was softest. Leaning over the stone parapet, no longer seeing either the smooth green of the pigeon-shooting ground, or the smooth blue of the sea beyond, he was moved, distressed, bewildered beyond words. Before breakfast! That was the devil of it! Confession, as it were, of everything. Moreover, he had seen their hands touching on the seat. The blood rushed up to his face, he had seen, spied out, what was not intended for his eyes. Nice position—that! Dolly, too, last night, had seen. But that was different. Women might see things—it was expected of them. But for a man—a—a gentleman! The fullness of his embarrassment gradually disclosed itself. His hands were tied. Could he even consult Dolly? He had a feeling of isolation, of utter solitude. Nobody—not anybody in the world—could understand his secret and intense discomfort. To take up a

position—the position he was bound to take up, as Olive's nearest relative and protector, and—what was it—chaperon, by the aid of knowledge come at in such a way, however unintentionally! Never in all his days in the regiment—and many delicate matters affecting honour had come his way—had he had a thing like this to deal with. Poor child! But he had no business to think of her like that. No, indeed! She had not behaved—as—— And there he paused, curiously unable to condemn her. Suppose they got up and came that way!

He took his hands off the stone parapet, and made for his hotel. His palms were white from the force of his grip. He said to himself as he went along: "I must consider the whole question calmly; I must think it out." This gave him relief. With young Lennan, at all events, he could be angry. But even there he found, to his dismay, no finality of judgment. And this absence of finality, so unwonted, distressed him horribly. There was something in the way the young man had been sitting there beside her—so quiet, so almost timid—that had touched him. This was bad, by Jove—very bad! The two of them, they made, somehow, a nice couple! Confound it! This would not do! The chaplain of the little English church passing at this moment, called out, "Fine morning, Colonel Ercott." The Colonel saluted, and did not answer. The greeting at the moment seemed to him paltry. No morning could be fine that contained such a discovery. He entered the hotel, passed into the dining-room, and sat down. Nobody was there. They all had their breakfast upstairs, even Dolly. Olive alone was in the habit of supporting him while he ate an English breakfast. And suddenly he perceived that he was face to face already with this dreadful situation. To have breakfast without, as usual, waiting for her, seemed too pointed. She might be coming in at any minute now. To wait for her, and have it, without showing anything—how could he do that?

He was conscious of a faint rustling behind him. There she was, and nothing decided. In this moment of hopeless confusion the Colonel acted by pure instinct, rose, patted her cheek, and placed a chair.

"Well, my dear," he said; "hungry?"

She was looking very dainty, very soft. That creamy dress showed off her dark hair and eyes, which seemed somehow to be—flying off somewhere; yes—it was queer, but that was the only way to put it. He got no reassurance, no comfort from

the sight of her. And slowly he stripped the skin from the banana with which he always commenced breakfast. One might just as well be asked to shoot a tame dove or tear a pretty flower to pieces as be expected to take her to task, even if he could, in honour. And he sought refuge in the words:

"Been out?" Then could have bitten his tongue off. Suppose she answered: "No."

But she did not so answer. The colour came into her cheeks, indeed, but she nodded: "It's so lovely!"

How pretty she looked saying that! He had put himself out of court now—could never tell her what he had seen, after setting, as it were, that trap for her; and presently he asked:

"Got any plans to-day?"

She answered, without flinching in the least:

"Mark Lennan and I were going to take mules from Mentone up to Gorbio."

He was amazed at her steadiness—never, to his knowledge, having encountered a woman armoured at every point to preserve a love that flies against the world. How tell what was under her smile! And in confusion of feeling amounting almost to pain he heard her say:

"Will you and Aunt Dolly come?"

Between sense of trusteeship and hatred of spoiling sport; between knowledge of the danger she was in and half-pitying admiration at the sight of her; between real disapproval of an illicit and underhand business (what else was it, after all?) and some dim perception that here was something he did not begin to be able to fathom—something with which perhaps no one but those two themselves could deal—between these various extremes he was lost indeed. And he stammered out:

"I must ask your aunt; she—she's not very good on a mule."

Then, in an impulse of sheer affection, he said with startling suddenness: "My dear, I've often meant to ask, are you happy at home?"

"At home?"

There was something sinister about the way she repeated that, as if the word home were strange to her.

She drank her coffee and got up; and the Colonel felt afraid of her, standing there—afraid of what she was going to tell him. He grew very red. But, worse than all, she said absolutely nothing; only shrugged her shoulders with a little smile that went to his heart.

VI

On the wild thyme, under the olives below the rock village of Gorbio, with their mules cropping at a little distance, those two sat after their lunch, listening to the cuckoos. Since their uncanny chance meeting that morning in the gardens, when they sat with their hands just touching, amazed and elated by their own good fortune, there was not much need to say what they felt, to break with words this rapture of belonging to each other —so shyly, so wildly, so, as it were, without reality. They were like epicures with old wine in their glasses, not yet tired of its fragrance and the spell of anticipation.

And so their talk was not of love, but, in that pathetic way of star-crossed lovers, of the things they loved; leaving out— each other.

It was the telling of her dream which brought the words from him at last; but she drew away, and answered:

"It can't—it mustn't be!"

Then he just clung to her hand; and presently, seeing that her eyes were wet, took courage enough to kiss her cheek.

Trembling and fugitive indeed that first passage of their love. Not much of the conquering male in him, nor in her of the ordinary enchantress.

And then they went, outwardly sober enough, riding their mules down the stony slopes back to Mentone.

But in the grey, dusty railway-carriage, when she had left him, he was like a man drugged, staring at where she had sat opposite.

Two hours later, at dinner in her hotel, between her and Mrs. Ercott, with the Colonel opposite, he knew for the first time what he was faced with. To watch every thought that passed within him, lest it should by the slightest sign betray him; to regulate and veil every look and every word he spoke to her; never for a second to forget that these other persons were actual and dangerous, not merely insignificant and grotesque shadows. It would be perhaps for ever a part of his love for her to seem not to love her. He did not dare dream of fulfilment. He was to be her friend, and try to bring her happiness—burn and long,

for her, and not think about reward. This was his first real overwhelming passion—so different to the loves of spring—and he brought to it all that naïveté, that touching quality of young Englishmen, whose secret instinct it is to back away from the full nature of love, even from admitting that it has that nature. They two were to love, and—not to love! For the first time he understood a little of what that meant. A few stolen adoring minutes now and then, and, for the rest, the presence of a world which must be deceived. Already he had almost a hatred of that orderly, brown-faced Colonel, with his eyes that looked so steady and saw nothing; of that flat, kindly lady, who talked so pleasantly throughout dinner, saying things that he had to answer without knowing what they signified. He realised, with a sense of shock, that he was deprived of all interests in life but one; not even his work had any meaning apart from *her*. It lit no fire within him to hear Mrs. Ercott praise certain execrable pictures in the Royal Academy, which she had religiously visited the day before leaving home. And as the interminable meal wore on, he began even to feel grief and wonder that Olive could be so smiling, so gay, and calm; so, as it seemed to him, indifferent to this intolerable impossibility of exchanging even one look of love. Did she really love him—could she love him, and show not one little sign of it? And suddenly he felt her foot touch his own. It was the faintest sidelong, supplicating pressure, withdrawn at once, but it said: 'I know what you are suffering; I, too, am suffering!' Characteristically, he felt that it cost her dear to make use of that little primitive device of common loves; the touch awoke within him only chivalry. He would burn for ever sooner than cause her the pain of thinking that he was not happy.

After dinner, they sat out on a balcony. The stars glowed above the palms; a frog was croaking. He managed to draw his chair so that he could look at her unseen. How deep, and softly dark her eyes, when for a second they rested on his! A moth settled on her knee—a cunning little creature, with its hooded, horned owl's face, and tiny black slits of eyes! Would it have come so confidingly to anyone but her? The Colonel knew its name—he had collected it. Very common, he said. The interest in it passed; but Lennan stayed bent forward, gazing at that silk-covered knee.

The voice of Mrs. Ercott, sharper than its wont, said: "What day does Robert say he wants you back, my dear?"

He managed to remain gazing at the moth, even to take it gently from her knee, while he listened to her calm answer:

"Tuesday, I believe."

Then he got up, and let the moth fly into the darkness; his hands and lips were trembling, and he was afraid of their being seen. He had never known, had not dreamed, of such a violent, sick feeling. That this man could thus hale her home at will! It was grotesque, fantastic, awful, but—it was true! Next Tuesday she would journey back away from him to be again at the mercy of her Fate! The pain of this thought made him grip the railing, and grit his teeth, to keep himself from crying out. And another thought came to him: I shall have to go about with this feeling, day and night, and keep it secret.

They were saying good-night; and he had to smirk and smile, and pretend—to her above all—that he was happy, and he could see that she knew it was pretence.

Then he was alone, with the feeling that he had failed her at the first shot; torn, too, between horror of what he suddenly saw before him, and longing to be back in her presence at any cost. . . . And all this on the day of that first kiss which had seemed to him to make her so utterly his own.

He sat down on a bench facing the Casino. Neither the lights, nor the people passing in and out, not even the gipsy bandsmen's music, distracted his thoughts for a second. Could it be less than twenty-four hours since he had picked up her handkerchief, not thirty yards away? In that twenty-four hours he seemed to have known every emotion that man could feel. And in all the world there was now not one soul to whom he could speak his real thoughts—not even to her, because from her, beyond all, he must keep at any cost all knowledge of his unhappiness. So this was illicit love—as it was called! Loneliness, and torture! Not jealousy—for her heart was his; but amazement, outrage, fear. Endless lonely suffering! And nobody, if they knew, would care, or pity him one jot!

Was there really, then, as the ancients thought, a Dæmon who liked to play with men, as men liked to stir an earwig and turn it over and put a foot on it in the end?

He got up and made his way towards the railway-station. There was the bench where she had been sitting when he came on her that very morning. The stars in their courses had seemed to fight for them then; but whether for joy he no longer knew. And there on the seat were still the pepper berries she

had crushed and strewn. He broke off another bunch and bruised them. That scent was the ghost of sacred minutes when her hand lay against his own. The stars in their courses—for joy or sorrow!

VII

THERE was no peace now for Colonel and Mrs. Ercott. They felt themselves conspirators, and of conspiracy they had never had the habit. Yet how could they openly deal with anxieties which had arisen solely from what they had chanced secretly to see? What was not intended for one's eyes and ears did not exist; no canon of conduct could be quite so sacred. As well defend the opening of another person's letters as admit the possibility of making use of adventitious knowledge. So far tradition, and indeed character, made them feel at one, and conspire freely. But they diverged on a deeper plane. Mrs. Ercott had *said,* indeed, that here was something which could not be controlled; the Colonel had *felt* it—a very different thing! Less tolerant in theory, he was touched at heart; Mrs. Ercott, in theory almost approving—she read that dangerous authoress, George Eliot—at heart felt cold towards her husband's niece. For these reasons they could not in fact conspire without, in the end, saying suddenly: "Well, it's no good talking about it!" and almost at once beginning to talk about it again.

In proposing to her that mule, the Colonel had not had time, or, rather, not quite conviction enough as to his line of action, to explain so immediately the new need for her to sit upon it. It was only when, to his somewhat strange relief, she had refused the expedition, and Olive had started without them, that he told her of the meeting in the Gardens, of which he had been witness. She then said at once that if she had known, she would, of course, have put up with anything in order to go; not because she approved of interfering, but because they must think of Robert! And the Colonel had said: "D——n the fellow!" And there the matter had rested for the moment, for both of them were wondering a little which fellow it was that he had damned. That indeed was the trouble. If the Colonel had not cared so much about his niece, and had liked, instead of rather disliking Cramier; if Mrs. Ercott had not found Mark Lennan a "nice boy," and had not secretly felt her husband's niece rather dangerous to her peace of mind; if, in few words, those three had been puppets made of wood and worked by law, it

would have been so much simpler for all concerned. It was the discovery that there was a personal equation in such matters, instead of just a simple rule of three, which disorganised the Colonel and made him almost angry; which depressed Mrs. Ercott and made her almost silent. . . . These two good souls had stumbled on a problem which has divided the world from birth. Shall cases be decided on their individual merits, or according to formal codes?

Beneath an appearance and a vocabulary more orthodox than ever, the Colonel's allegiance to Authority and the laws of Form was really shaken; he simply could not get out of his head the sight of those two young people sitting side by side, nor the tone of Olive's voice, when she had repeated his regrettable words about happiness at home.

If only the thing had not been so human! If only she had been someone else's niece, it would clearly have been her duty to remain unhappy. As it was, the more he thought, the less he knew what to think. A man who had never had any balance to speak of at his bank, and from the nomadic condition of his life had no exaggerated feeling for a settled social status —deeming Society in fact rather a bore—he did not unduly exaggerate the worldly dangers of this affair; neither did he honestly believe that she would burn in everlasting torment if she did not succeed in remaining true to "that great black chap," as he secretly called Cramier. His feeling was simply that it was an awful pity; a sort of unhappy conviction that it was not like the women of his family to fall upon such ways; that his dead brother would turn in his grave; in two words that it was "not done." Yet he was by no means of those who, giving latitude to women in general, fall with whips on those of their own family who take it. On the contrary, believing that Woman in general should be stainless to the world's eye, he was inclined to make allowance for an individual woman whom he knew and loved. A suspicion he had always entertained, that Cramier was not by breeding "quite the clean potato" may insensibly have influenced him just a little. He had heard indeed that he was not even entitled to the name of Cramier, but had been adopted by a childless man, who had brought him up and left him a lot of money. Something in this went against the grain of the childless Colonel. He had never adopted, nor been adopted by, anyone himself. There was a certain lack about a man who had been adopted, of reasonable guarantee—he was like a non-

vintage wine, or a horse without a pedigree; you could not quite rely on what he might do, having no tradition in his blood. His appearance, too, and manner somehow lent colour to this distrust. A touch of the tar-brush somewhere, and a stubborn, silent, pushing fellow. Why on earth had Olive ever married him! But then women were such kittle cattle, poor things! and old Lindsay, with his vestments and his views on obedience, must have been a Tartar as a father, poor old chap! Besides, Cramier, no doubt, was what most women would call good-looking; more taking to the eye than such a quiet fellow as young Lennan, whose features were rather anyhow, though pleasant enough, and with a nice smile—the sort of young man one could not help liking, and who certainly would never hurt a fly! And suddenly there came the thought: Why should he not go to young Lennan and put it to him straight? That he was in love with Olive? Not quite—but the way to do it would come to him. He brooded long over this idea, and spoke of it to Mrs. Ercott, while shaving, the next morning. Her answer: "My dear John, bosh!" removed his last doubt.

Without saying where he was going, he strolled out the moment after breakfast—and took a train to Beaulieu. At the young man's hotel he sent in his card, and was told that this Monsieur had already gone out for the day. His mood of marching straight up to the guns thus checked, he was left pensive and distraught. Not having seen Beaulieu (they spoke of it then as a coming place), he made his way up an incline. That whole hillside was covered with rose-trees. Thousands of these flowers were starring the lower air, and the strewn petals of blown and fallen roses covered the light soil. The Colonel put his nose to blossoms here and there, but they had little scent, as if they knew that the season was already over. A few blue-bloused peasants were still busy among them. And suddenly he came on young Lennan himself, sitting on a stone and dabbing away with his fingers at a lump of putty stuff. The Colonel hesitated. A part from obvious reasons for discomfiture, he had that feeling towards Art common to so many of his caste. It was not work, of course, but it was very clever—a mystery to him how anyone could do it! On seeing him, Lennan had risen, dropping his handkerchief over what he was modelling —but not before the Colonel had received a dim impression of something familiar. The young man was very red—the Colonel, too, was conscious suddenly of the heat. He held out his hand.

"Nice quiet place this," he stammered; "never seen it before. I called at your hotel."

Now that he had his chance, he was completely at a loss. The sight of the face emerging from that lump of "putty stuff" had quite unnerved him. The notion of this young man working at it up here all by himself, just because he was away an hour or two from the original, touched him. How on earth to say what he had come to say? It was altogether different from what he had thought. And it suddenly flashed through him—Dolly was right! She's always right—hang it!

"You're busy," he said; "I mustn't interrupt you."

"Not at all, sir. It was awfully good of you to look me up."

The Colonel stared. There was something about young Lennan that he had not noticed before; a "Don't take liberties with me!" look which made things difficult. But still he lingered, staring wistfully at the young man, who stood waiting with such politeness. Then a safe question shot into his mind:

"Ah! And when do you go back to England? We're off on Tuesday."

While he spoke, a puff of wind lifted the handkerchief from the modelled face. Would the young fellow put it back? He did not. And the Colonel thought:

'It would have been bad form. He knew I wouldn't take advantage. Yes! He's a gentleman!'

Lifting his hand to the salute, he said: "Well, I must be getting back. See you at dinner perhaps?" And turning on his heel he marched away.

The remembrance of that face in the "putty stuff" up there by the side of the road accompanied him home. It was bad—it was serious! And the sense that he counted for nothing in all of it grew and grew in him. He told no one of where he had been. . . .

When the Colonel turned with ceremony and left him, Lennan sat down again on the flat stone, took up his "putty stuff," and presently effaced that image. He sat still a long time, to all appearance watching the little blue butterflies playing round the red and tawny roses. Then his fingers began to work, feverishly shaping a head; not of a man, not of a beast, but a sort of horned, heavy mingling of the two. There was something frenetic in the movement of those rather short, blunt-ended fingers, as though they were strangling the thing they were creating.

VIII

In those days, such as had served their country travelled, as befitted Spartans, in ordinary first-class carriages, and woke in the morning at La Roche or some strange-sounding place, for paler coffee and the pale brioche. So it was with Colonel and Mrs. Ercott and their niece, accompanied by books they did not read, viands they did not eat, and one somnolent Irishman returning from the East. In the disposition of legs there was the usual difficulty, no one quite liking to put them up, and all ultimately doing so, save Olive. More than once during that night the Colonel, lying on the seat opposite, awoke and saw her sitting, withdrawn into her corner, with eyes still open. Staring at that little head which he admired so much, upright and unmoving, in its dark straw toque against the cushion, he would become suddenly alert. Kicking the Irishman slightly in the effort, he would slip his legs down, bend across to her in the darkness, and, conscious of a faint fragrance as of violets, whisper huskily: "Anything I can do for you, my dear?" When she had smiled and shaken her head, he would retreat, and after holding his breath to see if Dolly were asleep, would restore his feet, slightly kicking the Irishman. After one such expedition, for full ten minutes he remained awake, wondering at her tireless immobility. For indeed she was spending this night entranced, with the feeling that Lennan was beside her, holding her hand in his. She seemed actually to feel the touch of his finger against the tiny patch of her bare palm where the glove opened. It was wonderful, this uncanny communion in the dark rushing night—she would not have slept for worlds! Never before had she felt so close to him, not even when he had kissed her that once under the olives; nor even when at the concert yesterday his arm pressed hers; and his voice whispered words she heard so thirstily. And that golden fortnight passed and passed through her on an endless band of reminiscence. Its memories were like flowers, such scent and warmth and colour in them; and of all, none perhaps quite so poignant as the memory of the moment, at the door of their carriage, when he said, so low that she just heard: "Good-bye, my darling!" He had never before called her that. Not even his

touch on her cheek under the olives equalled the simple treasure of that word. And above the roar and clatter of the train, and the snoring of the Irishman, it kept sounding in her ears, hour after dark hour. It was perhaps not wonderful, that through all that night she never once looked the future in the face—made no plans, took no stock of her position; just yielded to memory, and to the half-dreamed sensation of his presence close beside her. Whatever might come afterwards, she was his this night. Such was the trance that gave to her the strange, soft, tireless immobility which so moved her Uncle whenever he woke up.

In Paris they drove from station to station in a vehicle unfit for three—"to stretch their legs"—as the Colonel said. Since he saw in his niece no signs of flagging, no regret, his spirits were rising, and he confided to Mrs. Ercott in the buffet at the Gare du Nord, when Olive had gone to wash, that he did not think there was much in it, after all, looking at the way she'd travelled.

But Mrs. Ercott answered:

"Haven't you ever noticed that Olive never shows what she does not want to? She has not got those eyes for nothing."

"What eyes?"

"Eyes that see everything, and seem to see nothing."

Conscious that something was hurting her, the Colonel tried to take her hand.

But Mrs. Ercott rose quickly, and went where he could not follow.

Thus suddenly deserted, the Colonel brooded, drumming on the little table. What now! Dolly was unjust! Poor Dolly! He was as fond of her as ever! Of course! How could he help Olive's being young—and pretty; how could he help looking after her, and wanting to save her from this mess! Thus he sat wondering, dismayed by the unreasonableness of women. It did not enter his head that Mrs. Ercott had been almost as sleepless as his niece, watching through closed eyes every one of those little expeditions of his, and saying to herself: "Ah! He doesn't care how *I* travel!"

She returned serene enough, concealing her "grief," and soon they were once more whirling towards England.

But the future had begun to lay its hand on Olive; the spell of the past was already losing power; the sense that it had all been a dream grew stronger every minute. In a few hours she

would re-enter the little house close under the shadow of that old Wren church, which reminded her somehow of childhood, and her austere father with his chiselled face. The meeting with her husband! How go through that! And to-night! But she did not care to contemplate to-night. And all those to-morrows wherein there was nothing she had to do of which it was reasonable to complain, yet nothing she could do without feeling that all the friendliness and zest and colour was out of life, and she a prisoner. Into those to-morrows she felt she would slip back, out of her dream; lost, with hardly perhaps an effort. To get away to the house on the river, where her husband came only at week-ends, had hitherto been a refuge; only she would not see Mark there—unless——! Then, with the thought that she would, must still see him sometimes, all again grew faintly glamorous. If only she did see him, what would the rest matter? Never again as it had before!

The Colonel was reaching down her handbag; his cheery: "Looks as if it would be rough!" aroused her. Glad to be alone, and tired enough now, she sought the ladies' cabin, and slept through the crossing, till the voice of the old stewardess awakened her: "You've had a nice sleep. We're alongside, miss." Ah! if he were but *that* now! She had been dreaming that she was sitting in a flowery field, and Lennan had drawn her up by the hands, with the words: "We're here, my darling!"

On deck, the Colonel laden with bags, was looking back for her, and trying to keep a space between him and his wife. He signalled with his chin. Threading her way towards him, she happened to look up. By the rails of the pier above she saw her husband. He was leaning there, looking intently down; his tall broad figure made the people on each side of him seem insignificant. The clean-shaved, square-cut face, with those almost epileptic, forceful eyes, had a stillness and intensity beside which the neighbouring faces seemed to disappear. She saw him very clearly, even noting the touch of silver in his dark hair, on each side under his straw hat; noting that he seemed too massive for his neat blue suit. His face relaxed; he made a neat little movement with one hand. Suddenly it shot through her: Suppose Mark had travelled with them, as he had wished to do? For ever and ever now, that dark massive creature, smiling down at her, was her enemy; from whom she must guard and keep herself if she could; keep, at all events, each

one of her real thoughts and hopes! She could have writhed, and cried out; instead, she tightened her grip on the handle of her bag, and smiled. Though so skilled in knowledge of his moods, she felt, in his greeting, his fierce grip of her shoulders, the smouldering of some feeling the nature of which she could not quite fathom. His voice had a grim sincerity: "Glad you're back—thought you were never coming!" Resigned to his charge, a feeling of sheer physical faintness so beset her that she could hardly reach the compartment he had reserved. It seemed to her that, for all her foreboding, she had not till this moment had the smallest inkling of what was now before her; and at his muttered: "Must we have the old fossils in?" she looked back to assure herself that her Uncle and Aunt were following. To avoid having to talk, she feigned to have travelled badly, leaning back with closed eyes, in her corner. If only she could open them and see, not this square-jawed face with its intent gaze of possession, but that other with its eager eyes humbly adoring her. The interminable journey ended all too soon. She clung quite desperately to the Colonel's hand on the platform at Charing Cross. When his kind face vanished she would be lost indeed! Then, in the closed cab, she heard her husband's: "Aren't you going to kiss me?" and submitted to his embrace.

She tried so hard to think: 'What does it matter? It's not I, not my soul, my spirit—only my miserable lips!'

She heard him say: "You don't seem too glad to see me!" And then: "I hear you had young Lennan out there. What was *he* doing?"

She felt the turmoil of sudden fear, wondered whether she was showing it, lost it in unnatural alertness—all in the second before she answered: "Oh! just a holiday."

Some seconds passed, and then he said:

"You didn't mention him in your letters."

She answered coolly: "Didn't I? We saw a good deal of him."

She knew that he was looking at her—an inquisitive, half-menacing regard. Why—oh, why!—could she not then and there cry out: "And I love him—do you hear?—I love him!" So awful did it seem to be denying her love with these half lies! But it was all so much more grim and hopeless than even she had thought. How inconceivable, now, that she had ever given herself up to this man for life! If only she could get away from

him to her room, and scheme and think! For his eyes never left her, travelling over her with their pathetic greed, their menacing inquiry, till he said: "Well, it's not done you any harm. You look very fit." But his touch was too much even for her self-command, and she recoiled as if he had struck her.

"What's the matter? Did I hurt you?"

It seemed to her that he was jeering—then realised as vividly that he was not. And the full danger to her, perhaps to Mark himself, of shrinking from this man, striking her with all its pitiable force, she made a painful effort, slipped her hand under his arm, and said: "I'm very tired. You startled me."

But he put her hand away, and turning his face, stared out of the window. And so they reached their home.

When he had left her alone, she remained where she was standing, by her wardrobe, without sound or movement, thinking: 'What am I going to do? How am I going to live?'

IX

When Mark Lennan, travelling through from Beaulieu, reached his rooms in Chelsea, he went at once to the little pile of his letters, twice hunted through them, then stood very still, with a stunned, sick feeling. Why had she not sent him that promised note? And now he realised—though not yet to the full—what it meant to be in love with a married woman. He must wait in this suspense for eighteen hours at least, till he could call, and find out what had happened to prevent her, till he could hear from her lips that she still loved him. The chilliest of legal lovers had access to his love, but he must possess a soul on fire, in this deadly patience, for fear of doing something that might jeopardise her. Telegraph? He dared not. Write? She would get it by the first post; but what could he say that was not dangerous, if Cramier chanced to see? Call? Still more impossible till three o'clock, at very earliest, tomorrow. His gaze wandered round the studio. Were these household gods, and all these works of his, indeed the same he had left twenty days ago? They seemed to exist now only in so far as she might come to see them—come and sit in such a chair, and drink out of such a cup, and let him put this cushion for her back, and that footstool for her feet. And so vividly could he see her lying back in that chair looking across at him, that he could hardly believe she had never yet sat there. It was odd how—without any resolution taken, without admission, that their love could not remain platonic, without any change in their relations, save one humble kiss and a few whispered words—everything was changed. A month or so ago, if he had wanted, he would have gone at once calmly to her house. It would have seemed harmless, and quite natural. Now it was impossible to do openly the least thing that strict convention did not find desirable. Sooner or later they would find him stepping over convention, and take him for what he was not—a real lover! A real lover! He knelt down before the empty chair and stretched out his arms. No substance—no warmth—no fragrance—nothing! Longing that passed through air, as the wind through grass.

He went to the little round window, which overlooked the

river. The last evening of May; gloaming above the water, dusk nesting in the trees, and the air warm! Better to be out, and moving in the night, out in the ebb and flow of things, among others whose hearts were beating, than stay in this place that without her was so cold and meaningless.

Lamps—the passion-fruit of towns—were turning from pallor to full orange, and the stars were coming out. Half-past nine! At ten o'clock, and not before, he would walk past her house. To have this something to look forward to, however furtive and barren, helped. But on a Saturday night there would be no sitting at the House. Cramier would be at home; or they would both be out; or perhaps have gone down to their river cottage. Cramier! What cruel demon had presided over that marring of her life! Why had he never met her till after she had bound herself to this man! From a negative contempt for one who was either not sensitive enough to recognise that his marriage was a failure, or not chivalrous enough to make that failure bear as little hardly as possible on his wife, he had come already to jealous hatred as of a monster. To be face to face with Cramier in a mortal conflict could alone have satisfied his feeling. . . . Yet he was a young man by nature gentle!

His heart beat desperately as he approached that street—one of those little old streets, so beautiful, that belong to a vanished London. It was very narrow, there was no shelter, and he thought confusedly of what he could say, if met in this remote backwater which led nowhere. He would tell some lie, no doubt. Lies would now be his daily business. Lies and hatred, those violent things of life, would come to seem quite natural, in the violence of his love.

He stood a moment, hesitating, by the rails of the old church. Black, white-veined, with shadowy summits, in that half-darkness, it was like some gigantic vision. Mystery itself seemed modelled there. He turned and walked quickly down the street close to the houses on the further side. The windows of her house were lighted! So, she was not away! Dim light in the dining-room, lights in the room above—her bedroom, doubtless. Was there no way to bring her to the window, no way his spirit could climb up there and beckon hers out to him? Perhaps she was not there, perhaps it was but a servant taking up hot water. He was at the end of the street by now, but to leave without once more passing was impossible. And this time

he went slowly, his head down, feigning abstraction, grudging every inch of pavement, and all the time furtively searching that window with the light behind the curtains. Nothing! Once more he was close to the railings of the church, and once more could not bring himself to go away. In the little, close, deserted street, not a soul was moving, not even a cat or dog; nothing alive but many discreet, lighted windows. Like veiled faces, showing no emotion, they seemed to watch his indecision. And he thought: 'Ah, well! I dare say there are lots like me. Lots as near, and yet as far away! Lots who have to suffer!' But what would he not have given for the throwing open of those curtains. Then, suddenly, scared by an approaching figure, he turned and walked away.

X

At three o'clock next day he called.

In the middle of her white drawing-room, whose latticed window ran the whole length of one wall, stood a little table on which was a silver jar full of early larkspurs, evidently from her garden by the river. And Lennan waited, his eyes fixed on those blossoms so like two little blue butterflies and strange-hued crickets, tethered to the pale green stems. In this room she passed her days, guarded from him. Once a week, at most, he would be able to come there—once a week for an hour or two out of the hundred and sixty-eight hours that he longed to be with her.

And suddenly he was conscious of her. She had come in without sound, and was standing by the piano, so pale, in her cream-white dress, that her eyes looked jet black. He hardly knew that face, like a flower closed against cold.

What had he done? What had happened in these five days to make her like this to him? He took her hands and tried to kiss them; but she said quickly:

"He's in!"

At that he stood silent, looking into that face, frozen to a dreadful composure, on the breaking up of which his very life seemed to depend. At last he said:

"What is it? Am I nothing to you, after all?"

But as soon as he had spoken he saw that he need not have asked, and flung his arms round her. She clung to him with desperation; then freed herself, and said:

"No, no; let's sit down quietly!"

He obeyed, half-divining, half-refusing to admit all that lay behind that strange coldness, and this desperate embrace; all the self-pity, and self-loathing, shame, rage, and longing of a married woman for the first time face to face with her lover in her husband's house.

She seemed now to be trying to make him forget her strange behaviour; to be what she had been during that fortnight in the sunshine. But, suddenly, just moving her lips, she said:

"Quick! When can we see each other? I will come to you to tea—to-morrow," and, following her eyes, he saw the door

opening, and Cramier coming in. Unsmiling, very big in the low room, he crossed over to them, and offered his hand to Lennan; then drawing a low chair forward between their two chairs, sat down.

"So you're back," he said. "Have a good time?"

"Thanks, yes; very."

"Luck for Olive you were there; those places are dull holes."

"It was luck for me."

"No doubt." And with those words he turned to his wife. His elbows rested along the arms of his chair, so that his clenched palms were upwards; it was as if he knew that he was holding those two; gripped one in each hand.

"I wonder," he said slowly, "that fellows like you, with nothing in the world to tie them, ever sit down in a place like London. I should have thought Rome or Paris were your happy hunting-grounds."

In his voice, in those eyes of his, a little bloodshot, with their look of power, in his whole attitude, there was a sort of muffled menace, and contempt, as though he were thinking: 'Step into my path, and I will crush you!'

And Lennan thought:

'How long must I sit here?' Then, past that figure planted solidly between them, he caught a look from her, swift, sure, marvellously timed—again and again—as if she were being urged by the very presence of this danger. One of those glances would surely—surely be seen by Cramier. Is there need for fear that a swallow should dash itself against the wall over which it skims? But he got up, unable to bear it longer.

"Going?" That one suave word had an inimitable insolence.

He could hardly see his hand touching Cramier's heavy fist. Then he realised that she was standing so that their faces when they must say good-bye could not be seen. Her eyes were smiling, yet imploring; her lips shaped the word: "To-morrow!" And squeezing her hand desperately, he got away.

He had never dreamed that to see her in the presence of the man who owned her would be so terrible. For a moment he thought that he must give her up, give up a love that would drive him mad.

He climbed on to an omnibus travelling West. Another twenty-four hours of starvation had begun. It did not matter at all what he did with them. They were simply so much aching that had to be got through somehow—so much aching;

and what relief at the end? An hour or two with her, desperately holding himself in.

Like most artists, and few Englishmen, he lived on feelings rather than on facts; so, found no refuge in decisive resolutions. But he made many—the resolution to give her up; to be true to the ideal of service for no reward; to beseech her to leave Cramier and come to him—and he made each many times.

At Hyde Park Corner he got down, and went into the Park, thinking that to walk would help him.

A great number of people were sitting there, taking mysterious anodyne, doing the right thing; to avoid them, he kept along the rails, and ran almost into the arms of Colonel and Mrs. Ercott, who were coming from the direction of Knightsbridge, slightly flushed, having lunched and talked of "Monte" at the house of a certain General.

They greeted him with the surprise of those who had said to each other many times: "That young man will come rushing back!" It was very nice—they said—to run across him. When did he arrive? They had thought he was going on to Italy—he was looking rather tired. They did not ask if he had seen her—being too kind, and perhaps afraid that he would say "Yes," which would be embarrassing; or that he would say "No," which would be still more embarrassing when they found that he ought to have said "Yes." Would he not come and sit with them a little—they were going presently to see how Olive was? Lennan perceived that they were warning him. And, forcing himself to look at them very straight, he said: "I have just been there."

Mrs. Ercott phrased her impressions that same evening: "He looks quite hunted, poor young man! I'm afraid there's going to be fearful trouble there. Did you notice how quickly he ran away from us? He's thin, too; if it wasn't for his tan, he'd look really ill. The boy's eyes are so pathetic; and he used to have such a nice smile in them."

The Colonel, who was fastening her hooks, paused in an operation requiring concentration.

"It's a thousand pities," he muttered, "that he hasn't any work to do. Puddling about with clay or whatever he does is no good at all." And slowly fastening one hook, he unhooked several others.

Mrs. Ercott went on:

"And I saw Olive, when she thought I wasn't looking; it

was just as if she'd taken off a mask. But Robert Cramier will never put up with it. He's in love with her still; I watched him. It's tragic, John."

The Colonel let his hands fall from the hooks.

"If I thought that," he said, "I'd do something."

"If you could, it would not be tragic."

The Colonel stared. There was always *something* to be done.

"You read too many novels," he said, but without spirit.

Mrs. Ercott smiled, and made no answer to an aspersion she had heard before.

XI

When Lennan reached his rooms again after that encounter with the Ercotts, he found in his letter-box a visiting card: "Mrs. Doone," "Miss Sylvia Doone," and on it pencilled the words: "Do come and see us before we go down to Hayle—Sylvia." He stared blankly at the round handwriting he knew so well.

Sylvia! Nothing perhaps could have made so plain to him how in this tornado of his passion the world was drowned. Sylvia! He had almost forgotten her existence; and yet, only last year, after he definitely settled down in London, he had once more seen a good deal of her; and even had soft thoughts of her again—with her pale-gold hair, her true look, her sweetness. Then they had gone for the winter to Algiers for her mother's health.

When they came back, he had already avoided seeing her, though that was before Olive went to Monte Carlo, before he had even admitted his own feelings. And since—he had not once thought of her. Not once! The world had indeed vanished. "Do come and see us—Sylvia." The very notion was an irritation. No rest from aching and impatience to be had that way.

And then the idea came to him: Why not kill these hours of waiting for to-morrow's meeting by going on the river and passing by her cottage? There was still one train that he could catch.

He reached the village after dark, and spent the night at the inn; got up early next morning, took a boat, and pulled down-stream. The bluffs of the opposite bank were wooded with high trees. The sun shone softly on their leaves, and the bright stream was ruffled by a breeze which bent all the reeds and slowly swayed the water-flowers. One thin white line of wind streaked the blue sky. He shipped his sculls and drifted, listening to the wood-pigeons, watching the swallows chasing. If only she were here! To spend one long day thus, drifting with the stream! To have but one such rest from longing! Her cottage, he knew, lay on the same side as the village, and just beyond an island. She had told him of a hedge of yew-trees,

and a white dove-cote almost at the water's edge. He came to the island, and let his boat slide into the backwater. It was all overgrown with willow trees and alders, dark even in this early morning radiance, and marvellously still. There was no room to row; he took the boathook and tried to punt, but the green water was too deep and entangled with great roots, so that he had to make his way by clawing with the hook at branches. Birds seemed to shun this gloom, but a single magpie crossed the one little clear patch of sky, and flew low behind the willows. The air here had a sweetish, earthy odour of too rank foliage; all brightness seemed entombed. He was glad to pass out again under a huge poplar-tree into the fluttering gold and silver of the morning. And almost at once he saw the yew-hedge at the border of some bright green turf, and a pigeon-house, high on its pole, painted cream-white. About it a number of ring-doves and snow-white pigeons were perched or flying; and beyond the lawn he could see the dark veranda of a low house, covered by wistaria just going out of flower. A drift of scent from late lilacs, and new-mown grass, was borne out to him, together with the sound of a mowing-machine, and the humming of many bees. It was beautiful here, and seemed, for all its restfulness, to have something of that flying quality he so loved about her face, about the sweep of her hair, the quick, soft turn of her eyes—or was that but the darkness of the yew-trees, the whiteness of the dove-cote, and the doves themselves, flying?

He lay there a long time quietly beneath the bank, careful not to attract the attention of the old gardener, who was methodically pushing his machine across and across the lawn. How he wanted her with him then! Wonderful that there could be in life such beauty and wild softness as made the heart ache with the delight of it, and in that same life grey rules and rigid barriers—coffins of happiness! That doors should be closed on love and joy! There was not so much of it in the world! She, who was the very spirit of this flying, nymph-like summer, was untimely wintered-up in bleak sorrow. There was a hateful unwisdom in that thought; it seemed so grim and violent, so corpse-like, gruesome, narrow and extravagant! What possible end could it serve that she should be unhappy! Even if he had not loved her, he would have hated her fate just as much—all such stories of imprisoned lives had roused his anger even as a boy.

Soft white clouds—those bright angels of the river, never

very long away—had begun now to spread their wings over the woods; and the wind had dropped so that the slumbrous warmth and murmuring of summer gathered full over the water. The old gardener had finished his job of mowing, and came with a little basket of grain to feed the doves. Lennan watched them going to him, the ring-doves, very dainty, and capricious, keeping to themselves. In place of that old fellow, he was really seeing *her,* feeding from her hands those birds of Cypris. What a group he could have made of her with them perching and flying round her! If she were his, what could he not achieve—to make her immortal—like the old Italians, who, in their work, had rescued their mistresses from Time! . . .

He was back in his rooms in London two hours before he dared begin expecting her. Living alone there but for a caretaker who came every morning for an hour or two, made dust, and departed, he had no need for caution. And when he had procured flowers, and the fruits and cakes which they certainly would not eat—when he had arranged the tea-table, and made the grand tour at least twenty times, he placed himself with a book at the little round window, to watch for her approach. There, very still, he sat, not reading a word, continually moistening his dry lips and sighing, to relieve the tension of his heart. At last he saw her coming. She was walking close to the railings of the houses, looking neither to right nor left. She had on a lawn frock, and a hat of the palest coffee-coloured straw, with a narrow black velvet ribbon. She crossed the side street, stopped for a second, gave a swift look round, then came resolutely on. What was it made him love her so? What was the secret of her fascination? Certainly no conscious enticements. Never did anyone try less to fascinate. He could not recall one single little thing that she had done to draw him to her. Was it, perhaps, her very passivity, her native pride that never offered or asked anything, a sort of soft stoicism in her fibre; that and some mysterious charm, as close and intimate as scent was to a flower?

He waited to open till he heard her footstep just outside. She came in without a word, not even looking at him. And he, too, said not a word till he had closed the door, and made sure of her. Then they turned to each other. Her breast was heaving a little, under her thin frock, but she was calmer than he, with that wonderful composure of pretty women in all the passages of love, as who should say: This is my native air!

They stood and looked at each other, as if they could never have enough, till he said at last:

"I thought I should die before this moment came. There isn't a minute that I don't long for you so terribly that I can hardly live."

"And do you think that I don't long for you?"

"Then come to me!"

She looked at him mournfully and shook her head.

Well, he had known that she would not. He had not earned her. What right had he to ask her to fly against the world, to brave everything, to have such faith in him—as yet? He had no heart to press his words, beginning then to understand the paralysing truth that there was no longer any resolving this or that; with love like his he had ceased to be a separate being with a separate will. He was entwined with her, could act only if her will and his were one. He would never be able to say to her: "You must!" He loved her too much. And she knew it. So there was nothing for it but to forget the ache, and make the hour happy. But how about that other truth—that in love there is no pause, no resting? . . . With any watering, however scant, the flower will grow till its time comes to be plucked. . . . This oasis in the desert—these few minutes with her alone, were swept through and through with a feverish wind. To be closer! How not try to be that? How not long for her lips when he had but her hand to kiss? And how not be poisoned with the thought that in a few minutes she would leave him and go back to the presence of that other, who, even though she loathed him, could see and touch her when he would? She was leaning back in the very chair where in fancy he had seen her, and he only dared sit at her feet and look up. And this, which a week ago would have been rapture, was now almost torture, so far did it fall short of his longing. It was torture, too, to keep his voice in tune with the sober sweetness of her voice. And bitterly he thought: 'How can she sit there, and not want me, as I want her?' Then at a touch of her fingers on his hair, he lost control, and kissed her lips. Her surrender lasted only for a second.

"No, no—you must not!"

That mournful surprise sobered him at once.

He got up, stood away from her, begged to be forgiven.

And, when she was gone, he sat in the chair where she had sat. That clasp of her, the kiss he had begged her to forget—

to forget!—nothing could take that from him. He had done wrong; had startled her, had fallen short of chivalry! And yet —a smile of utter happiness would cling about his lips. His fastidiousness, his imagination almost made him think that this was all he wanted. If he could close his eyes, now, and pass out, before he lost that moment of half-fulfilment!

And, the smile still on his lips, he lay back watching the flies wheeling and chasing round the hanging-lamp. Sixteen of them there were, wheeling and chasing—never still!

XII

When, walking from Lennan's studio, Olive re-entered her dark little hall, she approached its alcove and glanced first at the hat-stand. They were all there—the silk hat, the bowler, the straw! So he was in! And within each hat, in turn, she seemed to see her husband's head—with the face turned away from her—so distinctly as to note the leathery look of the skin of his cheek and neck. And she thought: 'I pray that he will die! It is wicked, but I pray that he will die!' Then, quietly, that he might not hear, she mounted to her bedroom. The door into his dressing-room was open, and she went to shut it. He was standing there at the window.

"Ah! You're in! Been anywhere?"

"To the National Gallery."

It was the first direct lie she had ever told him, and she was surprised to feel neither shame nor fear, but rather a sense of pleasure at defeating him. He was the enemy, all the more the enemy because she was still fighting against herself, and, so strangely, in his behalf.

"Alone?"

"Yes."

"Rather boring, wasn't it? I should have thought you'd have got young Lennan to take you there."

"Why?"

By instinct she had seized on the boldest answer; and there was nothing to be told from her face. If he were her superior in strength, he was her inferior in quickness.

He lowered his eyes, and said:

"His line, isn't it?"

With a shrug she turned away and shut the door. She sat down on the edge of her bed, very still. In that little passage of wits she had won, she could win in many such; but the full hideousness of things had come to her. Lies, lies! That was to be her life! That; or to say farewell to all she now cared for, to cause despair not only in herself, but in her lover, and—for what? In order that her body might remain at the disposal of that man in the next room—her spirit having flown from him for ever. Such were the alternatives, unless those words: "Then

come to me," were to be more than words. Were they? Could they be? They would mean such happiness if—if his love for her were more than a summer love? And hers for him? Was it —were they—more than summer loves? How know? And, without knowing, how give such pain to everyone? How break a vow she had thought herself quite above breaking? How make such a desperate departure from all the traditions and beliefs in which she had been brought up! But in the very nature of passion is that which resents the intrusion of hard and fast decisions. . . . And suddenly she thought: 'If our love cannot stay what it is, and if I cannot yet go to him for always, is there not still another way?'

She got up and began to dress for dinner. Standing before her glass she was surprised to see that her face showed no signs of the fears and doubts which were now her comrades. Was it because, whatever happened, she loved and was beloved! She wondered how she had looked when he kissed her so passionately; had she shown her joy before she checked him?

In her garden by the river were certain flowers that, for all her care, would grow rank and of the wrong colour—wanting a different soil. Was she, then, like those flowers of hers? Ah! Let her but have her true soil, and she would grow straight and true enough!

Then in the doorway she saw her husband. She had never, till to-day, quite hated him; but now she did, with a real blind horrible feeling. What did he want of her, standing there with those eyes fixed on her—those forceful eyes, touched with blood, seeming at once to threaten, covet, and beseech! She drew her wrapper close round her shoulders. At that he came up and said:

"Look at me, Olive!"

Against instinct and will she obeyed, and he went on:

"Be careful! I say, be careful!"

Then he took her by the shoulders, and raised her up to him. And, quite unnerved, she stood without resisting.

"I want you," he said; "I mean to keep you."

Then, suddenly letting her go, he covered his eyes with his hands. That frightened her most—it was so unlike him. Not till now had she understood between what terrifying forces she was balancing. She did not speak, but her face grew white. From behind those hands he uttered a sound, not quite like a human noise, turned sharply, and went out. She dropped back

into the chair before her mirror, overcome by the most singular feeling she had ever known; as if she had lost everything, even her love for Lennan, and her longing for his love. What was it all worth, what was anything worth in a world like this? All was loathsome, herself loathsome! All was a void! Hateful, hateful, hateful! It was like having no heart at all! And that same evening, when her husband had gone down to the House, she wrote to Lennan:

"Our love must never turn to earthiness as it might have this afternoon. Everything is black and hopeless. *He* suspects. For you to come here is impossible, and too dreadful for us both. And I have no right to ask you to be furtive, I can't bear to think of you like that, and I can't bear it myself. I don't know what to do or say. Don't try to see me yet. I must have time, I must think."

XIII

Colonel Ercott was not a racing man, but he had in common with others of his countrymen a religious feeling in the matter of the Derby. His remembrances of it went back to early youth, for he had been born and brought up almost within sound of the coaching-road to Epsom. Every Derby and Oaks day he had gone out on his pony to watch the passing of the tall hats and feathers of the great, and the pot-hats and feathers of the lowly; and afterwards, in the fields at home, had ridden races with old Lindsay, finishing between a cow for a judge, and a clump of bulrushes representing the Grand Stand.

But for one reason or another he had never seen the great race, and the notion that it was his duty to see it had now come to him. He proposed this to Mrs. Ercott with some diffidence. She read so many books—he did not quite know whether she would approve. Finding that she did, he added casually:

"And we might take Olive."

Mrs. Ercott answered dryly:

"You know the House of Commons has a holiday?"

The Colonel murmured:

"Oh! I don't want that chap!"

"Perhaps," said Mrs. Ercott, "you would like Mark Lennan."

The Colonel looked at her most dubiously. Dolly could talk of it as a tragedy, and a—a grand passion, and yet make a suggestion like that! Then his wrinkles began slowly to come alive, and he gave her waist a squeeze.

Mrs. Ercott did not resist that treatment.

"Take Olive alone," she said. "I don't really care to go."

When the Colonel went to fetch his niece he found her ready, and very half-heartedly he asked for Cramier. It appeared she had not told him.

Relieved, yet somewhat disconcerted, he murmured:

"He won't mind not going, I suppose?"

"If he went, I should not."

At this quiet answer the Colonel was beset again by all his fears. He put his white "topper" down, and took her hand.

"My dear," he said, "I don't want to intrude upon your feelings; but—but is there anything I can do? It's dreadful to see

things going unhappily with you!" He felt his hand being lifted, her face pressed against it; and, suffering acutely, with his other hand, cased in a bright new glove, he smoothed her arm. "We'll have a jolly good day, sweetheart," he said, "and forget all about it."

She gave the hand a kiss and turned away. And the Colonel vowed to himself that she should not be unhappy—lovely creature that she was, so delicate, and straight, and fine in her pearly frock. And he pulled himself together, brushing his white "topper" vigorously with his sleeve, forgetting that this kind of hat has no nap.

And so he was tenderness itself on the journey down, satisfying all her wants before she had them, telling her stories of Indian life, and consulting her carefully as to which horse they should back. There was the Duke's, of course, but there was another animal that appealed to him greatly. His friend Tabor had given him the tip—Tabor, who had the best Arabs in all India—and at a nice price. A man who practically never gambled, the Colonel liked to feel that his fancy would bring him in something really substantial—if it won; the idea that it could lose not really troubling him. However, they would see it in the paddock, and judge for themselves. The paddock was the place, away from all the dust and racket—Olive would enjoy the paddock! Once on the course, they neglected the first race; it was more important, the Colonel thought, that they should lunch. He wanted to see more colour in her cheeks, wanted to see her laugh. He had an invitation to his old regiment's drag, where the champagne was sure to be good. And he was so proud of her—would not have missed those young fellows' admiration of her for the world; though to take a lady amongst them was, in fact, against the rules. It was not, then, till the second race was due to start that they made their way into the paddock. Here the Derby horses were being led solemnly, attended each by a little posse of persons, looking up their legs and down their ribs to see whether they were worthy of support, together with a few who liked to see a whole horse at a time. Presently they found the animal which had been recommended to the Colonel. It was a chestnut, with a starred forehead, parading in a far corner. The Colonel, who really loved a horse, was deep in admiration. He liked its head and he liked its hocks; above all, he liked its eye. A fine creature, all sense and fire—perhaps just a little straight in the shoulder for coming down the hill! And

in the midst of his examination he found himself staring at his niece. What breeding the child showed, with her delicate arched brows, little ears, and fine, close nostrils; and the way she moved —so sure and springy. She was too pretty to suffer! A shame! If she hadn't been so pretty that young fellow wouldn't have fallen in love with her. If she weren't so pretty—that husband of hers wouldn't——! And the Colonel dropped his gaze, startled by the discovery he had stumbled on. If she hadn't been so pretty! Was that the meaning of it all? The cynicism of his own reflection struck him between wind and water. And yet something in himself seemed to confirm it somehow. What then? Was he to let them tear her in two between them, destroying her, because she was so pretty? And somehow this discovery of his —that passion springs from worship of beauty and warmth, of form and colour—disturbed him horribly, for he had no habit of philosophy. The thought seemed to him strangely crude, even immoral. That she should be thus between two ravening desires—a bird between two hawks, a fruit between two mouths! It was a way of looking at things that had never before occurred to him. The idea of a husband clutching at his wife, the idea of that young man who looked so gentle, swooping down on her; and the idea that if she faded, lost her looks, went off, their greed, indeed, any man's, would die away—all these horrible ideas hurt him the more for the remarkable suddenness with which they had come to him. A tragic business! Dolly had said so. Queer and quick—were women! But his resolution that the day was to be jolly soon recurred to him, and he hastily resumed inspection of his fancy. Perhaps they ought to have a ten-pound note on it, and they had better get back to the Stand! And as they went the Colonel saw, standing beneath a tree at a little distance, a young man that he could have sworn was Lennan. Not likely for an artist chap to be down here! But it *was* undoubtedly young Lennan, brushed up, in a top-hat. Fortunately, however, his face was not turned in their direction. He said nothing to Olive, not wishing—especially after those unpleasant thoughts—to take responsibility, and he kept her moving towards the gate, congratulating himself that his eyes had been so sharp. In the crush there he was separated from her a little, but she was soon beside him again; and more than ever he congratulated himself that nothing had occurred to upset her and spoil the day. Her cheeks were warm enough now, her dark eyes glowing. She was excited no doubt by thoughts of

the race, and of the "tenner" he was going to put on for her.

He recounted the matter afterwards to Mrs. Ercott. "That chestnut Tabor put me on to finished nowhere—couldn't get down the hill—knew it wouldn't the moment I set eyes on it. But the child enjoyed herself. Wish you'd been there, my dear!" Of his deeper thoughts and of that glimpse of young Lennan he did not speak, for on the way home an ugly suspicion had attacked him. Had the young fellow, after all, seen and managed to get close to her in the crush at the paddock gateway?

XIV

That letter of hers fanned the flame in Lennan as nothing had yet fanned it. Earthiness! Was it earthiness to love as he did? If so, then not for all the world would he be otherwise than earthy. In the shock of reading it, he crossed his Rubicon, and burned his boats behind him. No more did the pale ghost, chivalrous devotion, haunt him. He knew now that he could not stop short. Since she asked him, he must not, of course, try to see her just yet. But when he did, then he would fight for his life; the thought that she might be meaning to slip away from him was too utterly unbearable. But she could not be meaning that! She would never be so cruel! Ah! she would —she must come to him in the end! The world, life itself, would be well lost for love of her!

Thus resolved, he was even able to work again; and all that Tuesday he modelled at a big version of the fantastic, bull-like figure he had conceived after the Colonel left him up on the hillside at Beaulieu. He worked at it with a sort of evil joy. Into this creature he would put the spirit of possession that held her from him. And while his fingers forced the clay, he felt as if he had Cramier's neck within his grip. Yet, now that he had resolved to take her if he could, he had not quite the same hatred. After all, this man loved her too, could not help it that she loathed him; could not help it that he had the disposition of her, body and soul!

June had come in with skies of a blue that not even London glare and dust could pale. In every square and park and patch of green the air simmered with life and with the music of birds swaying on little boughs. Piano organs in the streets were no longer wistful for the South; lovers already sat in the shade of trees.

To remain indoors, when he was not working, was sheer torture; for he could not read, and had lost all interest in the little excitements, amusements, occupations that go to make up the normal life of man. Every outer thing seemed to have dropped off, shrivelled, leaving him just a condition of the spirit, a state of mind.

Lying awake he would think of things in the past, and they

would mean nothing—all dissolved and dispersed by the heat of this feeling in him. Indeed, his sense of isolation was so strong that he could not even believe he had lived through the facts which his memory apprehended. He had become one burning mood—that, and nothing more.

To be out, especially amongst trees, was the only solace.

And he sat for a long time that evening under a large lime-tree on a knoll above the Serpentine. There was very little breeze, just enough to keep alive a kind of whispering. What if men and women, when they had lived their gusty lives, became trees! What if someone who had burned and ached were now spreading over him this leafy peace—this blue-black shadow against the stars? Or were the stars, perhaps, the souls of men and women escaped for ever from love and longing? He broke off a branch of the lime and drew it across his face. It was not yet in flower, but it smelled lemony and fresh even here in London. If only for a moment he could desert his own heart, and rest with the trees and stars!

No further letter came from her next morning, and he soon lost his power to work. It was Derby Day. He determined to go down. Perhaps she would be there. Even if she were not, he might find some little distraction in the crowd and the horses. He had seen her in the paddock long before the Colonel's sharp eyes detected him; and, following in the crush managed to touch her hand in the crowded gateway, and whisper: "To-morrow, the National Gallery, at four o'clock—by the Bacchus and Ariadne. For God's sake!" Her gloved hand pressed his hard; and she was gone. He stayed in the paddock, too happy almost to breathe. . . .

Next day, while waiting before that picture, he looked at it with wonder. For there seemed his own passion transfigured in the darkening star-crowned sky, and the eyes of the leaping god. In spirit, was he not always rushing to her like that? Minutes passed, and she did not come. What should he do if she failed him? Surely die of disappointment and despair. . . . He had little enough experience as yet of the toughness of the human heart; how life bruises and crushes, yet leaves it beating. . . . Then, from an unlikely quarter, he saw her coming.

They walked in silence down to the quiet rooms where the Turner watercolours hung. No one, save two Frenchmen and an old official, watched them passing slowly before those little

pictures, till they came to the end wall, and, unseen, unheard by any but her, he could begin!

The arguments he had so carefully rehearsed were all forgotten; nothing left but an incoherent pleading. Life without her was not life; and they had only one life for love—one summer. It was all dark where she was not—the very sun itself was dark. Better to die than to live such false, broken lives, apart from each other. Better to die at once than to live wanting each other, longing and longing, and watching each other's sorrow. And all for the sake of what? It maddened, killed him, to think of that man touching her when he knew she did but hate him. It shamed all manhood; it could not be good to help such things to be. A vow when the spirit of it was gone was only superstition; it was wicked to waste one's life for the sake of that. Society—she knew, she must know—only cared for the forms, the outsides of things. And what did it matter what Society thought? It had no soul, no feeling, nothing. And if it were said they ought to sacrifice themselves for the sake of others, to make things happier in the world, she must know that was only true when love was light and selfish; but not when people loved as they did, with all their hearts and souls, so that they would die for each other any minute, so that without each other there was no meaning in anything. It would not help a single soul, for them to murder their love and all the happiness of their lives; to go on in a sort of living death. Even if it were wrong, he would rather do that wrong, and take the consequences! But it was not, it *could* not be wrong, when they felt like that!

And all the time that he was pouring forth those supplications, his eyes searched and searched her face. But there only came from her: "I don't know—I can't tell—if only I knew!" And then he was silent, stricken to the heart; till, at a look or a touch from her, he would break out again: "You do love me—you do; then what does anything else matter?"

And so it went on and on that summer afternoon, in the deserted room meant for such other things, where the two Frenchmen were too sympathetic, and the old official too drowsy, to come. Then it all narrowed to one fierce, insistent question:

"What is it—*what* is it you're afraid of?"

But to that, too, he got only the one mournful answer, paralysing in its fateful monotony.

"I don't know—I can't tell!"

It was awful to go on thus beating against this uncanny, dark, shadowy resistance; these unreal doubts and dreads, which by their very dumbness were becoming real to him, too. If only she could tell him what she feared! It could not be poverty—that was not like her—besides, he had enough for both. It could not be loss of a social position, which was but irksome to her! Surely it was not fear that he would cease to love her! What was it? In God's name—what?

To-morrow—she had told him—she was to go down, alone, to the river-house; would she not come now, this very minute, to him instead? And they would start off—that night, back to the South where their love had flowered. But again it was: "I can't! I don't know—I must have time!" And yet her eyes had that brooding love-light. How *could* she hold back and waver? But, utterly exhausted, he did not plead again; did not even resist when she said: "You must go, now; and leave me to get back! I will write. Perhaps—soon—I shall know." He begged for, and took one kiss; then, passing the old official, went quickly up and out.

XV

He reached his rooms overcome by a lassitude that was not, however, quite despair. He had made his effort, failed—but there was still within him the unconquerable hope of the passionate lover. . . . As well try to extinguish in full June the beating of the heart of summer, deny to the flowers their deepening hues, or to winged life its slumbrous buzzing, as stifle in such a lover his conviction of fulfilment. . . .

He lay down on a couch, and there stayed a long time quite still, his forehead pressed against the wall. His will was already beginning to recover for a fresh attempt. It was merciful that she was going away from Cramier, going to where he had in fancy watched her feed her doves. No laws, no fears, not even her commands could stop his fancy from conjuring her up by day and night. He had but to close his eyes, and she was there.

A ring at the bell, repeated several times, roused him at last to go to the door. His caller was Robert Cramier. And at sight of him, all Lennan's lethargy gave place to a steely feeling. What had brought him here? Had he been spying on his wife? The old longing for physical combat came over him. Cramier was perhaps fifteen years his senior, but taller, heavier, thicker. Chances, then, were pretty equal!

"Won't you come in?" he said.

"Thanks."

The voice had in it the same mockery as on Sunday; and it shot through him that Cramier had thought to find his wife here. If so, he did not betray it by any crude look round. He came in with his deliberate step, light and well-poised for so big a man.

"So this," he said, "is where you produce your masterpieces! Anything great since you came back?"

Lennan lifted the cloths from the half-modelled figure of his bull-man. He felt malicious pleasure in doing that. Would Cramier recognise himself in this creature with the horn-like ears, and great bossed forehead? If this man who had her happiness beneath his heel had come here to mock, he should at all events get what he had come to give. And he waited.

"I see. You are giving the poor brute horns!"

If Cramier had seen, he had dared to add a touch of cynical humour, which the sculptor himself had never thought of. And this even evoked in the young man a kind of admiring compunction.

"Those are not horns," he said gently; "only ears."

Cramier lifted a hand and touched the edge of his own ear.

"Not quite like that, are they—human ears? But I suppose you would call this symbolic. What, if I may ask, does it represent?"

All the softness in Lennan vanished.

"If you can't gather that from looking, it must be a failure."

"Not at all. If I am right, you want something for it to tread on, don't you, to get your full effect?"

Lennan touched the base of the clay.

"The broken curve here"——then, with sudden disgust at this fencing, was silent. What had the man come for? He must want something. And, as if answering, Cramier said:

"To pass to another subject—you see a good deal of my wife. I just wanted to tell you that I don't very much care that you should. It is as well to be quite frank, I think."

Lennan bowed.

"Is that not," he said, "perhaps rather a matter for *her* decision?"

That heavy figure—those threatening eyes! The whole thing was like a dream come true!

"I do not feel it so. I am not one of those who let things drift. Please understand me. You come between us at your peril."

Lennan kept silence for a moment, then he said quietly:

"Can one come between two people who have ceased to have anything in common?"

The veins in Cramier's forehead were swollen, his face and neck had grown crimson. And Lennan thought with strange elation: 'Now he's going to hit me!' He could hardly keep his hands from shooting out and seizing in advance that great strong neck. If he could strangle, and have done with him!

But, quite suddenly, Cramier turned on his heel. "I have warned you," he said, and went.

Lennan took a long breath. So! That was over, and he knew where he was. If Cramier had struck out, he would surely have seized his neck and held on till life was gone. Nothing

should have shaken him off. In fancy he could see himself swaying, writhing, reeling, battered about by those heavy fists, but always with his hands on the thick neck, squeezing out its life. He could feel, absolutely feel, the last reel and stagger of that great bulk crashing down, dragging him with it, till it lay upturned, still. He covered his eyes with his hands. . . . Thank God! The fellow had not hit out!

He went to the door, opened it, and stood leaning against the door-post. All was still and drowsy out there in that quiet backwater of a street. Not a soul in sight! How still, for London! Only the birds. In a neighbouring studio someone was playing Chopin. Queer! He had almost forgotten there was such a thing as Chopin. A mazurka! Spinning like some top thing, round and round—weird little tune! . . . Well, and what now? Only one thing certain. Sooner give up life than give her up! Far sooner! Love her, achieve her—or give up everything, and drown to that tune going on and on, that little dancing dirge of summer!

XVI

At her cottage Olive stood often by the river.

What lay beneath all that bright water—what strange, deep, swaying life, so far below the ruffling of wind, and the shadows of the willow trees? Was love down there, too? Love between sentient things, where it was almost dark; or had all passion climbed up to rustle with the reeds, and float with the water-flowers in the sunlight? Was there colour? Or had colour been drowned? No scent and no music; but movement there would be, for all the dim groping things bending one way to the current—movement, no less than in the aspen-leaves, never quite still, and the winged droves of the clouds. And if it were dark down there, it was dark, too, above the water; and hearts ached, and eyes just as much searched for that which did not come.

To watch it always flowing by to the sea; never looking back, never swaying this way or that; drifting along, quiet as Fate—dark, or glamorous with the gold and moonlight of these beautiful days and nights, when every flower in her garden, in the fields, and along the river banks, was full of sweet life; when dog-roses starred the lanes, and in the wood the bracken was high already.

She was not alone there, though she would much rather have been; two days after she left London her Uncle and Aunt had joined her. It was from Cramier they had received their invitation. He himself had not yet been down.

Every night, having parted from Mrs. Ercott and gone up the wide shallow stairs to her room, she would sit down at the window to write to Lennan, one candle beside her—one pale flame for comrade, as it might be his spirit. Every evening she poured out to him her thoughts, and ended always: "Have patience!" She was still waiting for courage to pass that dark hedge of impalpable doubts and fears and scruples, of a dread that she could not make articulate even to herself. Having finished, she would lean out into the night. The Colonel, his black figure cloaked against the dew, would be pacing up and down the lawn, with his good-night cigar, whose fiery spark she could just discern; and, beyond, her ghostly dove-house;

and, beyond, the river—flowing. Then she would clasp herself close—afraid to stretch out her arms, lest she should be seen.

Each morning she rose early, dressed, and slipped away to the village to post her letter. From the woods across the river wild pigeons would be calling—as though Love itself pleaded with her afresh each day. She was back well before breakfast, to go up to her room and come down again as if for the first time. The Colonel, meeting her on the stairs, or in the hall, would say: "Ah, my dear! just beaten you! Slept well?" And, while her lips touched his cheek, slanted at the proper angle for uncles, he never dreamed that she had been three miles already through the dew.

Now that she was in the throes of an indecision, whose ending, one way or the other, must be so tremendous, now that she was in the very swirl, she let no sign at all escape her; the Colonel and even his wife were deceived into thinking that after all no great harm had been done. It was grateful to them to think so, because of that stewardship at Monte Carlo, of which they could not render too good account. The warm sleepy days, with a little croquet and a little paddling on the river, and much sitting out of doors, when the Colonel would read aloud from Tennyson, were very pleasant. To him—if not to Mrs. Ercott—it was especially jolly to be out of Town "this confounded crowded time of year." And so the days of early June went by, each finer than the last.

And then Cramier came down, without warning on a Friday evening. It was hot in London . . . the session dull. . . . The Jubilee turning everything upside down. . . . They were lucky to be out of Town!

A silent dinner—that!

Mrs. Ercott noticed that he drank wine like water, and for minutes at a time fixed his eyes, which looked heavy as if he had not been sleeping, not on his wife's face but on her neck. If Olive really disliked and feared him—as John would have it—she disguised her feelings very well! For so pale a woman she was looking brilliant that night. The sun had caught her cheeks, perhaps. That black low-cut frock suited her, with old Milanese-point lace matching her skin so well, and one carnation, of darkest red, at her breast. Her eyes were really sometimes like black velvet. It suited pale women to have those eyes, that looked so black at night! She was talking, too, and laughing more than usual. One would have said: A wife delighted

to welcome her husband! And yet there was something—something in the air, in the feel of things—the lowering fixity of that man's eyes, or—thunder coming, after all this heat! Surely the night was unnaturally still and dark, hardly a breath of air, and so many moths out there, passing the beam of light, like little pale spirits crossing a river! Mrs. Ercott smiled, pleased at that image. Moths! Men were like moths; there were women from whom they could not keep away. Yes, there was something about Olive that drew men to her. Not meretricious—to do her justice, not that at all; but something soft, and—fatal; like one of these candle-flames to the poor moths. John's eyes were never quite as she knew them when he was looking at Olive; and Robert Cramier's—what a queer, drugged look they had! As for that other poor young fellow—she had never forgotten his face when they came on him in the Park!

And when after dinner they sat on the veranda, they were all more silent still, just watching, it seemed, the smoke of their cigarettes, rising quite straight, as though wind had been withdrawn from the world. The Colonel twice endeavoured to speak about the moon: It ought to be up by now! It was going to be full.

And then Cramier said: "Put on that scarf thing, Olive, and come round the garden with me."

Mrs. Ercott admitted to herself now that what John said was true. Just one gleam of eyes, turned quickly this way and that, as a bird looks for escape; and then Olive had got up and quietly gone with him down the path, till their silent figures were lost to sight.

Disturbed to the heart, Mrs. Ercott rose and went over to her husband's chair. He was frowning, and staring at his evening shoe balanced on a single toe. He looked up at her and put out his hand. Mrs. Ercott gave it a squeeze; she wanted comfort.

The Colonel spoke:

"It's heavy to-night, Dolly. I don't like the feel of it."

XVII

They had passed without a single word spoken, down through the laurels and guelder roses to the river bank; then he had turned to the right, and gone along it under the dove-house, to the yew-trees. There he had stopped, in the pitch darkness of that foliage. It seemed to her dreadfully still; if only there had been the faintest breeze, the faintest lisping of reeds on the water, one bird to make a sound; but nothing, nothing save his breathing, deep, irregular, with a quiver in it. What had he brought her here for? To show her how utterly she was his? Was he never going to speak, never going to say whatever it was he had in mind to say? If only he would not touch her!

Then he moved, and a stone dislodged fell with a splash into the water. She could not help a little gasp. How black the river looked! But slowly, beyond the dim shape of the giant poplar, a shiver of light stole outwards across the blackness from the far bank—the moon, whose rim she could now see rising, of a thick gold like a coin, above the woods. Her heart went out to that warm light. At all events there was one friendly inhabitant of this darkness.

Suddenly she felt his hands on her waist. She did not move, her heart beat too furiously; but a sort of prayer fluttered up from it against her lips. In the grip of those heavy hands was such quivering force!

His voice sounded very husky and strange: "Olive, this can't go on. I suffer. My God! I suffer!"

A pang went through her, a sort of surprise. Suffer! She might wish him dead, but she did not want him to suffer—God knew! And yet, gripped by those hands, she could not say: I am sorry!

He made a sound that was almost a groan, and dropped on his knees. Feeling herself held fast, she tried to push his forehead back from her waist. It was fiery hot; and she heard him mutter: "Have mercy! Love me a little!" But the clutch of his hands, never still on the thin silk of her dress, turned her faint. She tried to writhe away, but could not; stood still again, and at last found her voice.

"Mercy? Can I *make* myself love? No one ever could since the world began. Please, please get up! Let me go!"

But he was pulling her down to him so that she was forced on to her knees on the grass, with her face close to his. A low moaning was coming from him. It was horrible—so horrible! And he went on pleading, the words all confused, not looking in her face. It seemed to her that it would never end, that she would never get free of that grip, away from that stammering, whispering voice. She stayed by instinct utterly still, closing her eyes. Then she felt his gaze for the first time that evening on her face, and realised that he had not dared to look until her eyes were closed, for fear of reading what was in them. She said very gently:

"Please let me go. I think I'm going to faint."

He relaxed the grip of his arms; she sank down and stayed unmoving on the grass. After such utter stillness that she hardly knew whether he was there or not, she felt his hot hand on her bare shoulder. Was it all to begin again? She shrank down lower still, and a little moan escaped her. He let her go suddenly, and, when at last she looked up, was gone.

She got to her feet trembling, and moved quickly from under the yew-trees. She tried to think—tried to understand exactly what this portended for her, for him, for her lover. But she could not. There was around her thoughts the same breathless darkness that brooded over this night. Ah! but to the night had been given that pale-gold moon-ray, to herself nothing, no faintest gleam; as well try to pierce below the dark surface of that water!

She passed her hands over her face, and hair, and dress. How long had it lasted? How long had they been out here? And she began slowly moving back towards the house. Thank God! She had not yielded to fear or pity, not uttered falsities, not pretended she could love him, and betrayed her heart. That would have been the one unbearable thing to have been left remembering! She stood long looking down, as if trying to see the future in her dim flower-beds; then, bracing herself, hurried to the house. No one was on the veranda, no one in the drawing-room. She looked at the clock. Nearly eleven. Ringing for the servant to shut the windows, she stole up to her room. Had her husband gone away as he had come? Or would she presently again be face to face with that dread, the nerve of which never stopped aching now, dread of the night when he was near. She

determined not to go to bed, and drawing a long chair to the window, wrapped herself in a gown, and lay back.

The flower from her dress, miraculously uncrushed in those dark minutes on the grass, she set in water beside her at the window—Mark's favourite flower, he had once told her; it was a comfort, with its scent, and hue, and memory of him.

Strange that in her life, with all the faces seen, and people known, she had not loved one till she had met Lennan! She had even been sure that love would never come to her; had not wanted it—very much; had thought to go on well enough, and pass out at the end, never having known, or much cared to know, full summer. Love had taken its revenge on her now for all slighted love offered her in the past; for the one hated love that had to-night been on its knees to her. They said it must always come once to every man and woman—this witchery, this dark sweet feeling, springing up, who knew how or why? She had not believed, but now she knew. And whatever might be coming, she would not have this different. Since all things changed, she must change and get old and be no longer pretty for him to look at, but this in her heart could not change. She felt sure of that. It was as if something said: This is for ever, beyond life, beyond death, this is for ever! He will be dust, and you dust, but your love will live! Somewhere—in the woods, among the flowers, or down in the dark water, it will haunt! For it only you have lived! . . . Then she noticed that a slender silvery-winged thing, unlike any moth she had ever seen, had settled on her gown, close to her neck. It seemed to be sleeping, so delicate and drowsy, having come in from the breathless dark, thinking, perhaps, that her whiteness was a light. What dim memory did it rouse; something of *him*, something *he* had done—in darkness, on a night like this. Ah, yes! that evening after Gorbio, the little owl-moth on her knee! He had touched her when he took that cosy wan velvet-eyed thing off her!

She leaned out for air. What a night!—whose stars were hiding in the sheer heavy warmth; whose small, round, golden moon had no transparency! A night like a black pansy with a little gold heart. And silent! For, of the trees, that whispered so much at night, not even the aspens had voice. The unstirring air had a dream-solidity against her cheeks. But in all the stillness, what sentiency, what passion—as in her heart! Could she not draw *him* to her from those woods, from that dark

gleaming river, draw him from the flowers and trees and the passion-mood of the sky—draw him up to her waiting here, so that she was no more this craving creature, but one with him and the night! And she let her head droop down on her hands.

All night long she stayed there at the window. Sometimes dozing in the chair; once waking with a start, fancying that her husband was bending over her. Had he been—and stolen away? And the dawn came; dew-grey, filmy and wistful, woven round each black tree, and round the white dove-cot, and falling scarf-like along the river. And the chirrupings of birds stirred among leaves as yet invisible.

She slept then.

XVIII

When she awoke once more, in daylight, smiling, Cramier was standing beside her chair. His face, all dark and bitter, had the sodden look of a man very tired.

"So!" he said: "Sleeping this way doesn't spoil your dreams. Don't let me disturb them. I am just going back to Town."

Like a frightened bird, she stayed, not stirring, gazing at his back as he leaned in the window, till, turning round on her again, he said:

"But remember this: What I can't have, no one else shall! Do you understand? No one else!" And he bent down close, repeating: "Do you understand—you bad wife!"

Four years' submission to a touch she shrank from; one long effort not to shrink! Bad wife! Not if he killed her would she answer now!

"Do you hear?" he said once more: "Make up your mind to that. I mean it."

He had gripped the arms of her chair, till she could feel it quiver beneath her. Would he drive his fist into her face that she managed to keep still smiling? But there only passed into his eyes an expression which she could not read.

"Well," he said, "you know!" and walked heavily towards the door.

The moment he had gone she sprang up: Yes, she was a bad wife! A wife who had reached the end of her tether. A wife who hated instead of loving. A wife in prison! Bad wife! Martyrdom, then, for the sake of a faith in her that was lost already, could be but folly. If she seemed bad and false to him, there was no longer reason to pretend to be otherwise. No longer would she, in the words of the old song:—"sit and sigh—pulling bracken, pulling bracken." No more would she starve for want of love, and watch the nights throb and ache, as last night had throbbed and ached, with the passion that she might not satisfy.

And while she was dressing she wondered why she did not look tired. To get out quickly! To send her lover word at once to hasten to her while it was safe—that she might tell him she was coming to him out of prison! She would telegraph for

him to come that evening with a boat, opposite the tall poplar. She and her Aunt and Uncle were to go to dinner at the Rectory, but she would plead headache at the last minute. When the Ercotts had gone she would slip out, and he and she would row over to the wood, and be together for two hours of happiness. And they must make a clear plan, too—for to-morrow they would begin their life together. But it would not be safe to send that message from the village; she must go down and over the bridge to the postoffice on the other side, where they did not know her. It was too late now before breakfast. Better after, when she could slip away, knowing for certain that her husband had gone. It would still not be too late for her telegram—Lennan never left his rooms till the midday post which brought her letters.

She finished dressing, and knowing that she must show no trace of her excitement, sat quite still for several minutes, forcing herself into languor. Then she went down. Her husband had breakfasted and gone. At everything she did, and every word she spoke, she was now smiling with a sort of wonder, as if she were watching a self, that she had abandoned like an old garment, perform for her amusement. It even gave her no feeling of remorse to think she was going to do what would be so painful to the good Colonel. He was dear to her—but it did not matter. She was past all that. Nothing mattered—nothing in the world! It amused her to believe that her Uncle and Aunt misread her last night's walk in the dark garden, misread her languor and serenity. And at the first moment possible she flew out, and slipped away under cover of the yew-trees towards the river. Passing the spot where her husband had dragged her down to him on her knees in the grass, she felt a sort of surprise that she could ever have been so terrified. What was he? The past—nothing! And she flew on. She noted carefully the river bank opposite the tall poplar. It would be quite easy to get down from there into a boat. But they would not stay in that dark backwater. They would go over to the far side into those woods from which last night the moon had risen, those woods from which the pigeons mocked her every morning, those woods so full of summer. Coming back, no one would see her landing; for it would be pitch dark in the backwater. And, while she hurried, she looked back across her shoulder, marking where the water, entering, ceased to be bright. A dragon-fly brushed her cheek; she saw it vanish where the sunlight failed.

How suddenly its happy flight was quenched in that dark shade, as a candle flame blown out. The tree growth there was too thick—the queer stumps and snags had uncanny shapes, as of monstrous creatures, whose eyes seemed to peer out at you. She shivered. She had seen those monsters with their peering eyes somewhere. Ah! In her dream at Monte Carlo of that bull-face staring from the banks, while she drifted by, unable to cry out. No! The backwater was not a happy place—they would not stay there a single minute. And more swiftly than ever she flew on along the path. Soon she had crossed the bridge, sent off her message, and returned. But there were ten hours to get through before eight o'clock, and she did not hurry now. She wanted this day of summer to herself alone, a day of dreaming till he came; this day for which all her life till now had been shaping her—the day of love. Fate was very wonderful! If she had ever loved before; if she had known joy in her marriage—she could never have been feeling what she was feeling now, what she well knew she would never feel again. She crossed a new-mown hayfield, and finding a bank, threw herself down on her back among its uncut grasses. Far away at the other end men were scything. It was all very beautiful—the soft clouds floating, the clover-stalks pushing themselves against her palms, and stems of the tall couch grass cool to her cheeks; little blue butterflies; a lark, invisible; the scent of the ripe hay; and the gold-fairy arrows of the sun on her face and limbs. To grow and reach the hour of summer; all must do that! That was the meaning of Life! She had no more doubts and fears. She had no more dread, no bitterness, and no remorse for what she was going to do. She was doing it because she must. . . . As well might grass stay its ripening because it shall be cut down! She had, instead, a sense of something blessed and uplifting. Whatever Power had made her heart, had placed within it this love. Whatever it was, whoever it was, could not be angry with her!

A wild bee settled on her arm, and she held it up between her and the sun, so that she might enjoy its dusky glamour. It would not sting her—not to-day! The little blue butterflies, too, kept alighting on her, who lay there so still. And the love-songs of the wood-pigeons never ceased, nor the faint swish of scything.

At last she rose to make her way home. A telegram had come saying simply: "Yes." She read it with an unmoved face, having resorted again to her mask of languor. Toward tea-

time she confessed to headache, and said she would lie down. Up there in her room she spent those three hours writing—writing as best she could all she had passed through in thought and feeling, before making her decision. It seemed to her that she owed it to herself to tell her lover how she had come to what she had never thought to come to. She put what she had written in an envelope and sealed it. She would give it to him, that he might read and understand, when she had shown him with all of her how she loved him. It would pass the time for him, until to-morrow—until they set out on their new life together. For to-night they would make their plans, and to-morrow start.

At half-past seven she sent word that her headache was too bad to allow her to go out. This brought a visit from Mrs. Ercott: The Colonel and she were so distressed; but perhaps Olive was wise not to exert herself! And presently the Colonel himself spoke, lugubriously through the door: Not well enough to come? No fun without her! But she mustn't on any account strain herself! No, no!

Her heart smote her at that. He was always so good to her.

At last, watching from the corridor, she saw them sally forth down the drive—the Colonel a little in advance, carrying his wife's evening shoes. How nice he looked—with his brown face, and his grey moustache; so upright, and concerned with what he had in hand!

There was no languor in her now. She had dressed in white, and now she took a blue silk cloak with a hood, and caught up the flower that had so miraculously survived last night's wearing and pinned it at her breast. Then making sure no servant was about, she slipped downstairs and out. It was just eight, and the sun still glistened on the dove-cot. She kept away from that lest the birds should come fluttering about her, and betray her by cooing. When she had nearly reached the tow-path, she stopped affrighted. Surely something had moved, something heavy, with a sound of broken branches. Was it the memory of last night come on her again; or, indeed, someone there? She walked back a few steps. Foolish alarm! In the meadow beyond a cow was brushing against the hedge. And, stealing along the grass, out on to the tow-path, she went swiftly towards the poplar.

XIX

A HUNDRED times in these days of her absence Lennan had been on the point of going down, against her orders, just to pass the house, just to feel himself within reach, to catch a glimpse of her, perhaps, from afar. If his body haunted London, his spirit had passed down on to that river where he had drifted once already, reconnoitring. A hundred times—by day in fancy, and by night in dreams—pulling himself along by the boughs, he stole down that dim backwater, till the dark yews and the white dove-cot came into view.

For he thought now only of fulfilment. She was wasting cruelly away! Why should he leave her where she was? Leave her to profane herself and all womanhood in the arms of a man she hated?

And on that day of mid-June, when he received her telegram, it was as if he had been handed the key of Paradise.

Would she—could she mean to come away with him that very night? He would prepare for that at all events. He had so often in mind faced this crisis in his affairs, that now it only meant translating into action what had been carefully thought out. He packed, supplied himself liberally with money, and wrote a long letter to his guardian. It would hurt the old man—Gordy was over seventy now—but that could not be helped. He would not post it till he knew for certain.

After telling how it had all come about, he went on thus:

"I know that to many people, and perhaps to you, Gordy, it will seem very wrong, but it does not to me, and that is the simple truth. Everybody has his own views on such things, I suppose; and as I would not—on my honour, Gordy—ever have held or wished to hold, or ever will hold in marriage or out of marriage, any woman who does not love me, so I do not think it is acting as I would resent others acting towards me, to take away from such unhappiness this lady for whom I would die at any minute. I do not mean to say that pity has anything to do with it—I thought so at first, but I know now that it is all swallowed up in the most mighty feeling I have ever had or ever shall have. I am not a bit afraid of conscience. If God is Universal Truth,

He cannot look hardly upon us for being true to ourselves. And as to people, we shall just hold up our heads; I think that they generally take you at your own valuation. But, anyway, Society does not much matter. We shan't want those who don't want us—you may be sure. I hope he will divorce her quickly—there is nobody much to be hurt by that except you and Cis; but if he doesn't—it can't be helped. I don't think she has anything; but with my six hundred, and what I can make, even if we have to live abroad, we shall be all right for money. You have been awfully good to me always, Gordy, and I am very grieved to hurt you, and still more sorry if you think I am being ungrateful; but when one feels as I do—body and soul and spirit—there isn't any question; there wouldn't be if death itself stood in the way. If you receive this, we shall be gone together; I will write to you from wherever we pitch our tent, and, of course, I shall write to Cicely. But will you please tell Mrs. Doone and Sylvia, and give them my love if they still care to have it. Good-bye, dear Gordy. I believe you would have done the same, if you had been I. Always your affectionate—

"MARK."

In all those preparations he forgot nothing, employing every minute of the few hours in a sort of methodic exaltation. The last thing before setting out he took the damp cloths off his "bull-man." Into the face of the monster there had come of late a hungry, yearning look. The artist in him had done his work that unconscious justice; against his will had set down the truth. And, wondering whether he would ever work at it again, he re-damped the cloths and wrapped it carefully.

He did not go to her village, but to one five or six miles down the river—it was safer, and the row would steady him. Hiring a skiff, he pulled upstream. He travelled very slowly to kill time, keeping under the far bank. And as he pulled, his very heart seemed parched with nervousness. Was it real that he was going to her, or only some fantastic trick of Fate, a dream from which he would wake to find himself alone again? He passed the dove-cot at last, and kept on till he could round into the backwater and steal up under cover to the poplar. He arrived a few minutes before eight o'clock, turned the boat round, and waited close beneath the bank, holding to a branch, and standing so that he could see the path. If a man could die from longing and anxiety, surely Lennan must have died then!

All wind had failed, and the day was fallen into a wonderful still evening. Gnats were dancing in the sparse strips of sunlight that slanted across the dark water, now that the sun was low. From the fields, bereft of workers, came the scent of hay and the heavy scent of meadow-sweet; the musky odour of the backwater was confused with them into one brooding perfume. No one passed. And sounds were few and far to that wistful listener, for birds did not sing just there. How still and warm was the air, yet seemed to vibrate against his cheeks as though about to break into flame. That fancy came to him vividly while he stood waiting—a vision of heat simmering in little pale red flames. On the thick reeds some large, slow, dusky flies were still feeding, and now and then a moorhen a few yards away splashed a little, or uttered a sharp, shrill note. When she came —if she did come!—they would not stay here, in this dark earthy backwater; he would take her over to the other side, away to the woods! But the minutes passed, and his heart sank. Then it leaped up. Someone was coming—in white, with bare head, and something blue or black flung across her arm. It was she! No one else walked like that! She came very quickly. And he noticed that her hair looked like little wings on either side of her brow, as if her face were a white bird with dark wings, flying to love! Now she was close, so close that he could see her lips parted, and her eyes love-lighted—like nothing in the world but darkness wild with dew and starlight. He reached up and lifted her down into the boat, and the scent of some flower pressed against his face seemed to pierce into him and reach his very heart, awakening the memory of something past, forgotten. Then, seizing the branches, snapping them in his haste, he dragged the skiff along through the sluggish water, the gnats dancing in his face. She seemed to know where he was taking her, and neither of them spoke a single word, while he pulled out into the open, and over to the far bank.

There was but one field between them and the wood—a field of young wheat, with a hedge of thorn and alder. And close to that hedge they set out, their hands clasped. They had nothing to say yet—like children saving up. She had put on her cloak to hide her dress, and its silk swished against the silvery blades of the wheat. What had moved her to put on this blue cloak? Blue of the sky, and flowers, of birds' wings, and the black-burning blue of the night! The hue of all holy things! And how still it was in the late gleam of the sun! Not one little

sound of beast or bird or tree; not one bee humming! And not much colour—only the starry white hemlocks and globe-campion flowers, and the low-flying glamour of the last warm light on the wheat.

XX

. . . Now over wood and river the evening drew in fast. And first the swallows, that had looked as if they would never stay their hunting ceased; and the light, which had seemed fastened above the world, for all its last brightenings, slowly fell wingless and dusky.

The moon would not rise till ten! And all things waited. The creatures of night were slow to come forth after that long bright summer's day, watching for the shades of the trees to sink deeper and deeper into the now chalk-white water; watching for the chalk-white face of the sky to be masked with velvet. The very black-plumed trees themselves seemed to wait in suspense for the grape-bloom of night. All things stared, wan in that hour of passing day—all things had eyes wistful and unblessed. In those moments glamour was so dead that it was as if meaning had abandoned the earth. But not for long. Winged with darkness it stole back; not the soul of meaning that had gone, but a witch-like and brooding spirit harbouring in the black trees, in the high dark spears of the rushes, and on the grim-snouted snags which lurked along the river bank. Then the owls came out, and night-flying things. And in the wood began a cruel bird-tragedy—some dark pursuit in the twilight above the bracken; the piercing shrieks of a creature into whom talons have again and again gone home; and mingled with them, hoarse raging cries of triumph. Many minutes they lasted, those noises of the night, sound-emblems of all the cruelty in the heart of Nature; till at last death appeased that savagery. And any soul abroad, who pitied fugitives, might once more listen, and not weep. . . .

Then a nightingale began to give forth its long liquid gurgling; and a corn-crake churred in the young wheat. Again the night brooded, in the silent tops of the trees, in the more silent depths of the water. It sent out at long intervals a sigh or murmur, a tiny scuttling splash, an owl's hunting cry. And its breath was still hot and charged with heavy odour, for no dew was falling. . . .

XXI

It was past ten when they came out from the wood. She had wanted to wait for the moon to rise; not a gold coin of a moon as last night, but ivory pale, and with a gleaming radiance level over the fern, and covering the lower boughs, as it were, with a drift of white blossom.

Through the wicket gate they passed once more beside the moon-coloured wheat, which seemed of a different world from that world in which they had walked but an hour and a half ago.

And in Lennan's heart was a feeling such as a man's heart can only know once in all his life—such humble gratitude, and praise, and adoration of her who had given him her all. There should be nothing for her now but joy—like the joy of this last hour. She should never know less happiness! And kneeling down before her at the water's edge he kissed her dress, and hands, and feet, which to-morrow would be his for ever.

Then they got into the boat.

The smile of the moonlight glided over each ripple, and reed, and closing water-lily; over her face, where the hood had fallen back from her loosened hair; over one hand trailing the water, and the other touching the flower at her breast; and, just above her breath, she said:

"Row, my dear love; it's late!"

Dipping his sculls, he shot the skiff into the darkness of the backwater. . . .

What happened then he never knew, never clearly—in all those after years. A vision of her white form risen to its feet, bending forward like a creature caught, that cannot tell which way to spring; a crashing shock, his head striking something hard! Nothingness! And then—an awful, awful struggle with roots and weeds and slime, a desperate agony of groping in that pitchy blackness, among tree-stumps, in dead water that seemed to have no bottom—he and that other, who had leaped at them in the dark with his boat, like a murdering beast; a nightmare search more horrible than words could tell, till in a patch of moonlight on the bank they laid her, who for all their efforts never stirred. . . . There she lay all white, and they two

crouched at her head and feet—like dark creatures of the woods and waters over that which with their hunting they had slain.

How long they stayed there, not once looking at each other, not once speaking, not once ceasing to touch with their hands that dead thing—he never knew. How long in the summer night, with its moonlight and its shadows quivering round them, and the night wind talking in the reeds!

And then the most enduring of all sentient things had moved in him again; so that he once more felt. . . . Never again to see those eyes which had loved him with their light! Never again to kiss her lips! Frozen—like moonlight to the earth, with the flower still clinging at her breast. Thrown out on the bank like a plucked water-lily! Dead? No, no! Not dead! Alive in the night—alive to him—somewhere! Not on this dim bank, in this hideous backwater, with that dark dumb creature who had destroyed her! Out there on the river—in the wood of their happiness—somewhere alive! . . . And, staggering up past Cramier, who never moved, he got into his boat, and like one demented pulled out into the stream.

But once there in the tide, he fell huddled forward, motionless above his oars. . . .

And the moonlight flooded his dark skiff drifting down. And the moonlight effaced the ripples on the water that had stolen away her spirit. Her spirit mingled now with the white beauty and the shadows, for ever part of the stillness and the passion of a summer night; hovering, floating, listening to the rustle of the reeds, and the whispering of the woods; one with the endless dream—her spirit passing out, as all might wish to pass, in the hour of happiness.

PART III

AUTUMN

I

When on that November night Lennan stole to the open door of his dressing-room, and stood watching his wife asleep, Fate still waited for an answer.

A low fire was burning—one of those fires that throw faint shadows everywhere, and once and again glow so that some object shines for a moment, some shape is clearly seen. The curtains were not quite drawn, and a plane-tree branch with leaves still hanging, which had kept them company all the fifteen years they had lived there, was moving darkly in the wind, now touching the glass with a frail tap, as though asking of him, who had been roaming in that wind so many hours, to let it in. Unfailing comrades—London plane-trees!

He had not dared hope that Sylvia would be asleep. It was merciful that she was, whichever way the issue went—that issue so cruel! Her face was turned towards the fire, and one hand rested beneath her cheek. So she often slept. Even when life seemed all at sea, its landmarks lost, one still did what was customary. Poor tender-hearted thing—she had not slept since he told her, forty-eight hours, that seemed such years, ago! With her flaxen hair, and her touching candour, even in sleep, she looked like a girl lying there, not so greatly changed from what she had been that summer of Cicely's marriage down at Hayle. Her face had not grown old in all those twenty-eight years. There had been till now no special reason why it should. Thought, strong feeling, suffering, those were what changed faces; Sylvia had never thought very deeply, never suffered much, till now. And was it for him, who had been careful of her—very careful on the whole, despite man's selfishness, despite her never having understood the depths of him—was it for him of all people to hurt her so, to stamp her face with sorrow, perhaps destroy her utterly?

He crept a little farther in and sat down in the armchair beyond the fire. What memories a fire gathered into it, with its flaky ashes, its little leaf-like flames, and that quiet glow and flicker! What tale of passions! How like to a fire was a man's heart! The first young fitful leapings, the sudden, fierce, mastering heat, the long, steady sober burning, and then—that last flaming-up, that clutch back at its own vanished youth, the final eager flight of flame, before the ashes wintered it to nothing! Visions and memories he saw down in the fire, as only can be seen when a man's heart, by the agony of long struggle, has been stripped of skin, and quivers at every touch. Love! A strange haphazard thing was love—so spun between ecstasy and torture! A thing insidious, irresponsible, desperate. A flying sweetness, more poignant than anything on earth, more dark in origin and destiny. A thing without reason or coherence. A man's love-life—what say had he in the ebb and flow of it? No more than in the flights of autumn birds, swooping down, alighting here and there, passing on. The loves one left behind—even in a life by no means vagabond in love, as men's lives went! The love that thought the Tyrol skies would fall if he were not first with a certain lady. The love whose star had caught in the hair of Sylvia, now lying there asleep. A so-called love—that half-glamorous, yet sordid little meal of pleasure, which youth, however sensitive, must eat, it seems, some time or other with some young light of love—a glimpse of life that beforehand had seemed much and had meant little, save to leave him disillusioned with himself and sorry for his partner. And then the love that he could not, even after twenty years, bear to remember; that all-devouring summer passion, which in one night had gained all and lost all terribly, leaving on his soul a scar which could never be quite healed, leaving his spirit always a little lonely, haunted by the sense of what might have been. Of his share in that night of tragedy—that "terrible accident on the river"—no one had ever dreamed. And then the long despair which had seemed the last death of love had slowly passed, and yet another love had been born—or rather born again, pale, sober, but quite real; the fresh springing-up of a feeling long forgotten, of that protective devotion of his boyhood. He still remembered the expression on Sylvia's face when he passed her by chance in Oxford Street, soon after he came back from his four years of exile in the East and Rome—that look, eager, yet reproachful, then stoically ironic, as if saying:

"Oh, no! after forgetting me four years and more—you can't remember me now!" And when he spoke, the still more touching pleasure in her face. Then uncertain months, with a feeling of what the end would be; and then their marriage. Happy enough—gentle, not very vivid, nor spiritually very intimate—his work always secretly as remote from her as when she had thought to please him by putting jessamine stars on the heads of his beasts. A quiet successful union, not meaning, he had thought, so very much to him nor so very much to her—until forty-eight hours ago he told her; and she had shrunk, and wilted, and gone all to pieces. And what was it he had told her?

A long story—that!

Sitting there by the fire, with nothing yet decided, he could see it all from the start, with its devilish, delicate intricacy, its subtle slow enchantment spinning itself out of him, out of his own state of mind and body, rather than out of the spell cast over him, as though a sort of fatal force, long dormant, were working up again to burst into dark flower. . . .

II

Yes, it had begun within him over a year ago, with a queer unhappy restlessness, a feeling that life was slipping, ebbing away within reach of him, and his arms never stretched out to arrest it. It had begun with a sort of long craving, stilled only when he was working hard—a craving for he knew not what, an ache which was worst whenever the wind was soft.

They said that about forty-five was a perilous age for a man—especially for an artist. All the autumn of last year he had felt this vague misery rather badly. It had left him alone most of December and January, while he was working so hard at his group of lions; but the moment that was finished it had gripped him hard again. In those last days of January he well remembered wandering about in the parks day after day, trying to get away from it. Mild weather, with a scent in the wind! With what avidity he had watched children playing, the premature buds on the bushes, anything, everything young—with what an ache, too, he had been conscious of innumerable lives being lived round him, and loves loved, and he outside, unable to know, to grasp, to gather them; and all the time the sands of his hour-glass running out! A most absurd and unreasonable feeling for a man with everything he wanted, with work that he loved, quite enough money, and a wife so good as Sylvia—a feeling that no Englishman of forty-six, in excellent health, ought for a moment to have been troubled with. A feeling such as, indeed, no Englishman ever admitted having—so that there was not even, as yet, a Society for its suppression. For what was this disquiet feeling, but the sense that he had had his day, would never again know the stir and fearful joy of falling in love, but only just hanker after what was past and gone! Could anything be more reprehensible in a married man?

It was—yes—the last day of January, when, returning from one of those restless rambles in Hyde Park, he met Dromore. Queer to recognise a man hardly seen since school-days. Yet unmistakably, Johnny Dromore, sauntering along the rails of Piccadilly on the Green Park side, with that slightly rolling gait of his thin, horseman's legs, his dandified hat a little to one side, those strange, chaffing, goggling eyes, that look, as if

making a perpetual bet. Yes—the very same teasing, now moody, now reckless, always astute Johnny Dromore, with a good heart beneath an outside that seemed ashamed of it. Truly to have shared a room at school—to have been at College together, were links mysteriously indestructible.

"Mark Lennan! By gum! haven't seen you for ages. Not since you turned out a full-blown—what d'you call it? Awfully glad to meet you, old chap!"

Here was the past indeed, long vanished in feeling and thought and all; and Lennan's head buzzed, trying to find some common interest with this hunting, racing man-about-town.

Johnny Dromore come to life again—he whom the Machine had stamped with astute simplicity by the time he was twenty-two, and for ever after left untouched in thought and feeling—Johnny Dromore, who would never pass beyond the philosophy that all was queer and freakish which had not to do with horses, women, wine, cigars, jokes, good-heartedness, and that perpetual bet; Johnny Dromore, who, somewhere in him, had a pocket of depth, a streak of hunger, that was not just Johnny Dromore.

How queer was the sound of that jerky talk!

"You ever see old Fookes now? Been racin' at all? You live in Town? Remember good old Blenker?" And then silence and then another spurt: "Ever go down to 'Bambury's?' Ever go racin'? . . . Come on up to my 'digs.' You've got nothin' to do." No persuading Johnny Dromore that a "what d'you call it" could have anything to do. "Come on, old chap. I've got the hump. It's this damned east wind."

Well he remembered it, when they shared a room at "Bambury's"—that hump of Johnny Dromore's, after some reckless spree or bout of teasing.

And down that narrow bye-street of Piccadilly he had gone, and up into those "digs" on the first floor, with their little dark hall, their Van Beers' drawing and "Vanity Fair" cartoons, and prints of racehorses, and of the old Nightgown Steeplechase; with the big chairs, and all the paraphernalia of Race Guides and race-glasses, fox-masks, and stags'-horns, and hunting-whips. And yet, something which from the first moment struck him as not quite in keeping, foreign to the picture—a little jumble of books, a vase of flowers, a grey kitten.

"Sit down old chap. What'll you drink?"

Sunk into the recesses of a marvellous chair, with huge arms

of tawny leather, he listened and spoke drowsily. "Bambury's," Oxford, Gordy's clubs—dear old Gordy, gone now!—things long passed by; they seemed all round him once again. And yet, always that vague sense, threading this resurrection, threading the smoke of their cigars, and Johnny Dromore's clipped talk—of something that did not quite belong. Might it be, perhaps, that sepia drawing—above the "Tantalus" on the oak sideboard at the far end—of a woman's face gazing out into the room? Mysteriously unlike everything else, except the flowers, and this kitten pushing its furry little head against his hand. Odd how a single thing sometimes took possession of a room, however remote in spirit! It seemed to reach like a shadow over Dromore's outstretched limbs, and weathered, long-nosed face, behind his huge cigar; over the queer, solemn, chafing eyes, with something brooding in the depths of them.

"Ever get the hump? Bally awful, isn't it? It's getting old. We're bally old, you know, Lenny!" Ah! No one had called him "Lenny" for twenty years. And it was true; they were unmentionably old.

"When a fellow begins to feel old, you know, it's time he went broke—or something; doesn't bear sittin' down and lookin' at. Come out to 'Monte' with me!"

"Monte!" That old wound, never quite healed, started throbbing at the word, so that he could hardly speak his: "No, I don't care for 'Monte.'"

And, at once, he saw Dromore's eyes probing, questioning:

"You married?"

"Yes."

"Never thought of you as married!"

So Dromore did think of him. Queer! He never thought of Johnny Dromore.

"Winter's bally awful, when you're not huntin'. You've changed a lot; should hardly have known you. Last time I saw you, you'd just come back from Rome or somewhere. What's it like bein' a—a sculptor? Saw something of yours once. Ever do things of horses?"

Yes; he had done a "relief" of ponies only last year.

"You do women, too, I s'pose?"

"Not often."

The eyes goggled slightly. Quaint, that unholy interest! Just like boys, the Johnny Dromores—would never grow up, no matter how life treated them. If Dromore spoke out his soul,

as he used to speak it out at "Bambury's," he would say: "You get a pull there; you have a bally good time, I expect." That was the way it took them; just a converse manifestation of the very same feeling towards Art that the pious Philistines had, with their deploring eyebrows and their "peril to the soul." Babes all! Not a glimmering of what Art meant—of its effort, and its yearnings!

"You make money at it?"

"Oh, yes."

Again that appreciative goggle, as who should say: 'Ho! there's more in this than I thought!'

A long silence, then, in the dusk with the violet glimmer from outside the windows, the fire flickering in front of them, the grey kitten purring against his neck, the smoke of their cigars going up, and such a strange, dozing sense of rest, as he had not known for many days. And then—something, someone at the door, over by the sideboard! And Dromore speaking in a queer voice:

"Come in, Nell! D'you know my daughter?"

A hand took Lennan's, a hand which seemed to waver between the aplomb of a woman of the world, and a child's impulsive warmth. And a voice, young, clipped, clear, said:

"How d'you do? She's rather sweet, isn't she—my kitten?"

Then Dromore turned the light up. A figure fairly tall, in a grey riding-habit, stupendously well cut; a face not quite so round as a child's nor so shaped as a woman's blushing slightly, very calm; crinkly light-brown hair tied back with a black ribbon under a neat hat; and eyes like those eyes of Gainsborough's "Perdita"—slow, grey, mesmeric, with lang lashes curling up, eyes which draw things to them, still innocent.

And just on the point of saying: "I thought you'd stepped out of that picture"—he saw Dromore's face, and mumbled instead:

"So, it's *your* kitten?"

"Yes; she goes to everybody. Do you like Persians? She's all fur really. Feel!"

Entering with his fingers the recesses of the kitten, he said:

"Cats without fur are queer."

"Have you seen one without fur?"

"Oh, yes! In my profession we have to go below fur—I'm a sculptor."

"That must be awfully interesting."

What a woman of the world! But what a child, too! And now he could see that the face in the sepia drawing was older altogether—lips not so full, look not so innocent, cheeks not so round, and something sad and desperate about it—a face rudely touched by life. But the same eyes it had—and what charm, for all its disillusionment, its air of a history! Then he noticed, fastened to the frame, on a thin rod, a dust-coloured curtain, drawn to one side. The self-possessed young voice was saying:

"Would you mind if I showed you my drawings? It would be awfully good of you. You could tell me about them." And with dismay he saw her open a portfolio. While he scrutinised those schoolgirl's drawings, he could feel her looking at him, as animals do when they are making up their minds whether or no to like you; then she came and stood so close that her arm pressed his. He redoubled his efforts to find something good about the drawings. But in truth there was nothing good. And if, in other matters, he could lie well enough to save people's feelings, where Art was concerned he never could; so he merely said:

"You haven't been taught, you see."

"Will you teach me?"

But before he could answer, she was already effacing that naïve question in her most grown-up manner.

"Of course I oughtn't to ask. It would bore you awfully."

After that he vaguely remembered Dromore's asking if he ever rode in the Row; and those eyes of hers following him about; and her hand giving his another childish squeeze. Then he was on his way again down the dimly-lighted stairs, past an interminable array of "Vanity Fair" cartoons, out into the east wind.

III

Crossing the Green Park on his way home, was he more, or less, restless? Difficult to say. A little flattered, certainly, a little warmed; yet irritated, as always when he came into contact with people to whom the world of Art was such an amusing unreality. The notion of trying to show that child how to draw—that feather-pate, with her riding and her kitten; and her "Perdita" eyes! Quaint, how she had at once made friends with him! He was a little different, perhaps, from what she was accustomed to. And how daintily she spoke! A strange, attractive, almost lovely child! Certainly not more than seventeen—and—Johnny Dromore's daughter!

The wind was bitter, the lamps bright among the naked trees. Beautiful always—London at night, even in January, even in an east wind, with a beauty he never tired of. Its great dark, chiselled shapes, its gleaming lights, like droves of flying stars come to earth; and all warmed by the beat and stir of innumerable lives—those lives that he often ached to know and to be part of.

He told Sylvia of his encounter. Dromore! The name struck her. She had an old Irish song, "The Castle of Dromore," with a queer, haunting refrain.

It froze hard all the week, and he began a life-size group of their two sheep-dogs. Then a thaw set in with that first south-west wind, which brings each February a feeling of Spring such as is never again recaptured, and men's senses, like sleepy bees in the sun, go roving. It awakened in him more violently than ever the thirst to be living, knowing, loving—the craving for something new. Not this, of course, took him back to Dromore's rooms; oh, no! just friendliness, since he had not even told his old room-mate where he lived, or said that his wife would be glad to make his acquaintance, if he cared to come round. For Johnny Dromore had assuredly not seemed too happy, under all his hard-bitten air. Yes! it was but friendly to go again.

Dromore was seated in his long armchair, a cigar between his lips, a pencil in his hand, a Ruff's "Guide" on his knee; beside him was a large green book. There was a festive air

about him, very different from his spasmodic gloom of the other day; and he murmured without rising:

"Hallo, old man!—glad to see you. Take a pew! Look here! Agapemone—which d'you think I ought to put her to—San Diavolo or Ponte Canet?—not more than four crosses of St. Paul. Goin' to get a real good one from her this time!"

He, who had never heard these sainted names, answered.

"Oh! Ponte Canet, without doubt. But if you're working I'll come in another time."

"Lord! no! Have a smoke. I'll just finish lookin' out their blood—and take a pull."

And so Lennan sat down to watch those researches, wreathed in cigar smoke and punctuated by muttered expletives. They were as sacred and absorbing, no doubt, as his own efforts to create in clay; for before Dromore's inner vision was the perfect racehorse—he, too, was creating. Here was no mere dodge for making money, but a process hallowed by the peculiar sensation felt when one rubbed the palms of the hands together, the sensation which accompanied all creative achievement. Once only Dromore paused to turn his head and say:

"Bally hard, gettin' taproots right!"

Real Art! How well an artist knew that desperate search after the point of balance, the central rivet to be found before a form would come to life. . . . And he noted that to-day there was no kitten, no flowers, no sense at all of an extraneous presence—even the picture was curtained. Had the girl been just a dream—a fancy conjured up by his craving after youth?

Then he saw that Dromore had dropped the large green book, and was standing before the fire.

"Nell took to you the other day. But you always were a lady's man. Remember the girl at Coaster's?"

Coaster's tea-shop, where he would go every afternoon that he had money, just for the pleasure of looking shyly at a face. Something beautiful to look at—nothing more! Johnny Dromore would no better understand that now than when they were at "Bambury's." Not the smallest good even trying to explain! He looked up at the goggling eyes; he heard the bantering voice:

"I say—you *are* goin' grey. We're bally old, Lenny! A fellow gets old when he marries."

And he answered:

"By the way, I never knew that *you* had been."

From Dromore's face the chaffing look went, like a candle-flame blown out; and a coppery flush spread over it. For some seconds he did not speak, then, jerking his head towards the picture, he muttered gruffly:

"Never had the chance of marrying, there; Nell's 'outside.'"

A sort of anger leaped in Lennan; why should Dromore speak that word as if he were ashamed of his own daughter? Just like his sort—none so hidebound as men-about-town! Flotsam on the tide of other men's opinions; poor devils adrift, without the one true anchorage of their own real feelings! And doubtful whether Dromore would be pleased, or think him gushing, or even distrustful of his morality, he said:

"As for that, it would only make any decent man or woman nicer to her. When is she going to let me teach her drawing?"

Dromore crossed the room, drew back the curtain of the picture, and in a muffled voice, said:

"My God, Lenny! Life's unfair. Nell's coming killed her mother. I'd rather it had been me—bar chaff! Women have no luck."

Lennan got up from his comfortable chair. For, startled out of the past, the memory of that summer night, when yet another woman had no luck, was flooding his heart with its black, inextinguishable grief. He said quietly:

"The past *is* past, old man."

Dromore drew the curtain again across the picture, and came back to the fire. And for a full minute he stared into it.

"What am I to do with Nell? She's growing up."

"What have you done with her so far?"

"She's been at school. In the summer she goes to Ireland—I've got a bit of an old place there. She'll be eighteen in July. I shall have to introduce her to women, and all that. It's the devil! How? Who?"

Lennan could only murmur: "My wife, for one."

He took his leave soon after. Johnny Dromore! Bizarre guardian for that child! Queer life she must have of it, in that bachelor's den, surrounded by Ruff's "Guides"! What would become of her? Caught up by some young spark about town; married to him, no doubt—her father would see to the thoroughness of that, his standard of respectability was evidently high! And after—go the way, maybe, of her mother—that poor thing in the picture with the alluring, desperate face. Well! It was no business of his!

IV

No business of his! The merest sense of comradeship, then, took him once more to Dromore's after that disclosure, to prove that the word "outside" had no significance save in his friend's own fancy; to assure him again that Sylvia would be very glad to welcome the child at any time she liked to come.

When he had told her of that little matter of Nell's birth, she had been silent a long minute, looking in his face, and then had said: "Poor child! I wonder if *she* knows! People are so unkind, even nowadays!" He could not himself think of anyone who would pay attention to such a thing, except to be kinder to the girl; but in such matters Sylvia was the better judge, in closer touch with general thought. She met people that he did not—and of a more normal species.

It was rather late when he got to Dromore's diggings on that third visit.

"Mr. Dromore, sir," the man said—he had one of those strictly confidential faces bestowed by an all-wise Providence on servants in the neighbourhood of Piccadilly—"Mr. Dromore, sir, is not in. But he will be almost sure to be in to dress. Miss Nell is in, sir."

And there she was, sitting at the table, pasting photographs into an album—lonely young creature in that abode of male middle-age! Lennan stood, unheard, gazing at the back of her head, with its thick crinkly-brown hair tied back on her dark red frock. And, to the confidential man's soft:

"Mr. Lennan, miss," he added a softer: "May I come in?"

She put her hand into his with intense composure.

"Oh, yes, do! if you don't mind the mess I'm making;" and, with a little squeeze of the tips of his fingers, added: "Would it bore you to see my photographs?"

And down they sat together before the photographs—snapshots of people with guns or fishing-rods, little groups of schoolgirls, kittens, Dromore and herself on horseback, and several of a young man with a broad, daring, rather good-looking face. "That's Oliver—Oliver Dromore—Dad's first cousin once removed. Rather nice, isn't he? Do you like his expression?"

Lennan did not know. Not her second cousin; her father's

first cousin once removed! And again there leaped in him that unreasoning flame of indignant pity.

"And how about drawing? You haven't come to be taught yet."

She went almost as red as her frock.

"I thought you were only being polite. I oughtn't to have asked. Of course, I want to awfully—only I know it'll bore you."

"It won't at all."

She looked up at that. What peculiar languorous eyes they were!

"Shall I come to-morrow, then?"

"Any day you like, between half-past twelve and one."

"Where?"

He took out a card.

"Mark Lennan—yes—I like your name. I liked it the other day. It's awfully nice!"

What was in a name that she should like him because of it? His fame as a sculptor—such as it was—could have nothing to do with that, for she would certainly not know of it. Ah! but there was a lot in a name—for children. In his childhood what fascination there had been in the words macaroon, and Spaniard, and Carniola, and Aldebaran, and Mr. McCrae. For quite a week the whole world had been Mr. McCrae—a most ordinary friend of Gordy's.

By whatever fascination moved, she talked freely enough now—of her school; of riding and motoring—she seemed to love going very fast; about Newmarket—which was "perfect"; and theatres—plays of the type that Johnny Dromore might be expected to approve; these together with "Hamlet" and "King Lear" were all she had seen. Never was a girl so untouched by thought, or Art—yet not stupid, having, seemingly, a certain natural good taste; only, nothing, evidently, had come her way. How could it—"Johnny Dromore *duce, et auspice* Johnny Dromore!" She had been taken, indeed, to the National Gallery while at school. And Lennan had a vision of eight to ten young maidens trailing round at the skirts of one old maiden, admiring Landseer's dogs, giggling faintly at Botticelli's angels, gaping, rustling, chattering like young birds in a shrubbery.

But with all her surroundings, this child of Johnny Dromoredom was as yet more innocent than cultured girls of the same age. If those grey, mesmeric eyes of hers followed him

about, they did so frankly, unconsciously. There was no minx in her, so far.

An hour went by, and Dromore did not come. And the loneliness of this young creature in her incongruous abode began telling on Lennan's equanimity.

What did she do in the evenings?

"Sometimes I go to the theatre with Dad, generally I stay at home."

"And then?"

"Oh! I just read, or talk French."

"What? To yourself?"

"Yes, or to Oliver sometimes, when he comes in."

So Oliver came in!

"How long have you known Oliver?"

"Oh! ever since I was a child."

He wanted to say: And how long is that? But managed to refrain, and got up to go instead. She caught his sleeve and said:

"You're not to go!" Saying that, she looked as a dog will, going to bite in fun, her upper lip shortened above her small white teeth set fast on her lower lip, and her chin thrust a little forward. Glimpse of a wilful spirit! But as soon as he had smiled, and murmured:

"Ah! but I must, you see!" she at once regained her manners, only saying rather mournfully: "You don't call me by my name. Don't you like it?"

"Nell?"

"Yes. It's really Eleanor, of course. *Don't* you like it?"

If he had detested the name, he could only have answered: "Very much."

"I'm awfully glad! Good-bye."

When he got out into the street, he felt terribly like a man who, instead of having had his sleeve touched, has had his heart plucked at. And that warm, bewildered feeling lasted him all the way home.

Changing for dinner, he looked at himself with unwonted attention. Yes, his dark hair was still thick, but going distinctly grey; there were very many lines about his eyes, too, and those eyes, still eager when they smiled, were particularly deepset, as if life had forced them back. His cheekbones were almost "bopsies" now, and his cheeks very thin and dark, and his jaw looked too set and bony below the almost black mous-

tache. Altogether a face a good deal worn by life, with nothing for a child to take a fancy to and make friends with, that he could see.

Sylvia came in while he was thus taking stock of himself, bringing a freshly-opened flask of eau-de-Cologne. She was always bringing him something—never was anyone so sweet in those ways. In that grey, low-cut frock, her white, still prettiness and pale-gold hair, so little touched by Time, only just fell short of real beauty for lack of a spice of depth and of incisiveness, just as her spirit lacked he knew not what of poignancy. He would not for the world have let her know that he ever felt that lack. If a man could not hide little rifts in the lute from one so good and humble and affectionate, he was not fit to live.

She sang "The Castle of Dromore" again that night with its queer haunting lilt. And when she had gone up, and he was smoking over the fire, the girl in her dark-red frock seemed to come, and sit opposite with her eyes fixed on his, just as she had been sitting while they talked. Dark red had suited her! Suited the look on her face when she said: "You're not to go!" Odd, indeed, if she had not some devil in her, with that parentage!

V

Next day they had summoned him from the studio to see a peculiar phenomenon—Johnny Dromore, very well groomed, talking to Sylvia with unnatural suavity, and carefully masking the goggle in his eyes! Mrs. Lennan ride? Ah! Too busy, of course. Helped Mark with his—er—— No! Really! Read a lot, no doubt? Never had any time for readin' himself—awful bore not havin' time to read! And Sylvia listening and smiling, very still and soft.

What had Dromore come for? To spy out the land, discover why Lennan and his wife thought nothing of the word "outside"—whether, in fact, their household was respectable. . . . A man must always look twice at "what-d'you-call-ems," even if they have shared his room at school! . . . To his credit, of course, to be so careful of his daughter, at the expense of time owed to the creation of the perfect racehorse! On the whole he seemed to be coming to the conclusion that they might be useful to Nell in the uncomfortable time at hand when she would have to go about; seemed even to be falling under the spell of Sylvia's transparent goodness—abandoning his habitual vigilance against being scored off in life's perpetual bet; parting with his armour of chaff. Almost a relief, indeed, once out of Sylvia's presence, to see that familiar, unholy curiosity creeping back into his eyes, as though they were hoping against parental hope to find something—er—amusing somewhere about that mysterious Mecca of good times—a "what-d'you-call-it's" studio. Delicious to watch the conflict between relief and disappointment. Alas! no model—not even a statue without clothes; nothing but portrait heads, casts of animals, and suchlike sobrieties—absolutely nothing that could bring a blush to the cheek of the young person, or a glow to the eyes of a Johnny Dromore.

With what curious silence he walked round and round the group of sheep-dogs, inquiring into them with that long crinkled nose of his! With what curious suddenness, he said: "Damned good! You wouldn't do me one of Nell on horseback?" With what dubious watchfulness he listened to the answer:

"I might, perhaps, do a statuette of her; if I did, you should have a cast."

Did he think that in some way he was being outmanœuvred? For he remained some seconds in a sort of trance before muttering, as though clinching a bet:

"Done! And if you want to ride with her to get the hang of it, I can always mount you."

When he had gone, Lennan remained staring at his unfinished sheep-dogs in the gathering dusk. Again that sense of irritation at contact with something strange, hostile, uncomprehending! Why let these Dromores into his life like this? He shut the studio, and went back to the drawing-room. Sylvia was sitting on the fender, gazing at the fire, and she edged along so as to rest against his knees. The light from a candle on her writing-table was shining on her hair, her cheek, and chin, which years had so little altered. A pretty picture she made, with just that candle flame, swaying there, burning slowly, surely down the pale wax—candle flame, of all lifeless things most living, most like a spirit, so bland and vague, one would hardly have known it was fire at all. A drift of wind blew it this way and that: he got up to shut the window, and as he came back, Sylvia said:

"I like Mr. Dromore. I think he's nicer than he looks."

"He's asked me to make a statuette of his daughter on horseback."

"And will you?"

"I don't know."

"If she's really so pretty, you'd better."

"Pretty's hardly the word—but she's not ordinary."

She turned round, and looked up at him, and instinctively he felt that something difficult to answer was coming next.

"Mark."

"Yes."

"I wanted to ask you: Are you really happy nowadays?"

"Of course. Why not?"

What else to be said? To speak of those feelings of the last few months—those feelings so ridiculous to anyone who had them not—would only disturb her horribly.

And having received her answer, Sylvia turned back to the fire, resting silently against his knees. . . .

Three days later the sheep-dogs suddenly abandoned the pose

into which he had lured them with such difficulty, and made for the studio door. There in the street was Nell Dromore, mounted on a narrow little black horse with a white star, a white hoof, and devilish little goat's ears, pricked, and very close together at the tips.

"Dad said I had better ride round and show you Magpie. He's not very good at standing still. Are those your dogs? What darlings!"

She had slipped her knee already from the pummel, and slid down; the sheep-dogs were instantly on their hind-feet, propping themselves against her waist. Lennan held the black horse —a bizarre little beast, all fire and whipcord, with a skin like satin, liquid eyes, very straight hocks, and a thin bang-tail reaching down to them. The little creature had none of those commonplace good looks so discouraging to artists.

He had forgotten its rider till she looked up from the dogs, and said: "Do you like him? It *is* nice of you to be going to do us."

When she had ridden away, looking back until she turned the corner, he tried to lure the two dogs once more to their pose. But they would sit no more, going continually to the door, listening and sniffing; and everything felt disturbed and out of gear.

That same afternoon at Sylvia's suggestion he went with her to call on the Dromores.

While they were being ushered in he heard a man's voice rather high-pitched speaking in some language not his own; then the girl:

"No, no, Oliver. '*Dans l'amour il y a toujours un qui aime, et l'autre qui se laisse aimer.*'"

She was sitting in her father's chair, and on the window-sill they saw a young man lolling, who rose and stood stock-still, with an almost insolent expression on his broad, good-looking face. Lennan scrutinised him with interest—about twenty-four he might be, rather dandified, clean-shaved, with crisp dark hair and wide-set hazel eyes, and, as in his photograph, a curious look of daring. His voice, when he vouchsafed a greeting, was rather high and not unpleasant, with a touch of lazy drawl.

They stayed but a few minutes, and going down those dimly lighted stairs again, Sylvia remarked:

"How prettily she said good-bye—as if she were putting up

her face to be kissed! I think she's lovely. So does that young man. They go well together."

Rather abruptly Lennan answered:

"Ah! I suppose they do."

VI

She came to them often after that, sometimes alone, twice with Johnny Dromore, sometimes with young Oliver, who, under Sylvia's spell, soon lost his stand-off air. And the statuette was begun. Then came Spring in earnest, and that real business of life—the racing of horses "on the flat," when Johnny Dromore's genius was no longer hampered by the illegitimate risks of 'jumpin'." He came to dine with them the day before the first Newmarket meeting. He had a soft spot for Sylvia, always saying to Lennan as he went away: "Charmin' woman—your wife!" She, too, had a soft spot for him, having fathomed the utter helplessness of this worldling's wisdom, and thinking him pathetic.

After he was gone that evening, she said:

"Ought we to have Nell to stay with us while you're finishing her? She must be very lonely now her father's so much away."

It was like Sylvia to think of that; but would it be pleasure or vexation to have in the house this child with her quaint grown-upness, her confiding ways, and those "Perdita" eyes? In truth he did not know.

She came to them with touching alacrity—very like a dog, who, left at home when the family goes for a holiday, takes at once to those who make much of it.

And she was no trouble, too well-accustomed to amuse herself; and always quaint to watch, with her continual changes from child to woman of the world. A new sensation, this—of a young creature in the house. Both he and Sylvia had wanted children, without luck. Twice illness had stood in the way. Was it, perhaps, just that little lack in her—that lack of poignancy, which had prevented her from becoming a mother? An only child herself, she had no nieces or nephews; Cicely's boys had always been at school, and now were out in the world. Yes, a new sensation, and one in which Lennan's restless feelings seemed to merge and vanish.

Outside the hours when Nell sat to him, he purposely saw but little of her, leaving her to nestle under Sylvia's wing; and this she did, as if she never wanted to come out. Thus he pre-

served his amusement at her quaint warmths, and quainter calmness, his æsthetic pleasure in watching her, whose strange, half-hypnotised, half-hypnotic gaze, had a sort of dreamy and pathetic lovingness, as if she were brimful of affections which had no outlet.

Every morning after "sitting" she would stay an hour bent over her own drawing, which made practically no progress; and he would often catch her following his movements with those great eyes of hers, while the sheep-dogs would lie perfectly still at her feet, blinking horribly—such was her attraction. His birds also, a jackdaw and an owl, who had the run of the studio, tolerated her as they tolerated no other female, save the housekeeper. The jackdaw would perch on her and peck her dress; but the owl merely engaged her in combats of mesmeric gazing, which never ended in victory for either.

Now that she was with them, Oliver Dromore began to haunt the house, coming at all hours, on very transparent excuses. She behaved to him with extreme capriciousness, sometimes hardly speaking, sometimes treating him like a brother; and in spite of all his nonchalance, the poor youth would just sit glowering, or gazing out his adoration, according to her mood.

One of these July evenings Lennan remembered beyond all others. He had come, after a hard day's work, out from his studio into the courtyard garden to smoke a cigarette and feel the sun on his cheek before it sank behind the wall. A piano-organ far away was grinding out a waltz; and on an hydrangea tub, under the drawing-room window, he sat down to listen. Nothing was visible from there, save just the square patch of a quite blue sky, and one soft plume of smoke from his own kitchen chimney; nothing audible save that tune, and the never-ending street murmur. Twice birds flew across—starlings. It was very peaceful, and his thoughts went floating like the smoke of his cigarette, to meet who-knew-what other thoughts—for thoughts, no doubt, had little swift lives of their own; desired, found their mates, and, lightly blending, sent forth offspring. Why not? All things were possible in this wonder-house of a world. Even that waltz tune, floating away, would find some melody to wed, and twine with, and produce a fresh chord which might float in turn to catch the hum of a gnat or fly, and breed again. Queer—how everything sought to entwine with something else! On one of the pinkish blooms of the hydrangea he noted a bee—of all things, in this hidden-away

garden of tiles and gravel and plants in tubs! The little furry, lonely thing was drowsily clinging there, as if it had forgotten what it had come for—seduced, maybe, like himself, from labour by these last rays of the sun. Its wings, close-furled were glistening; its eyes seemed closed. And the piano-organ played on, a tune of yearning, waiting, yearning. . . .

Then, through the window above his head, he heard Oliver Dromore—a voice one could always tell, pitched high, with its slight drawl—pleading, very softly at first, then insistent, imperious; and suddenly Nell's answering voice:

"I won't, Oliver! I won't! I won't!"

He rose to go out of earshot. Then a door slammed, and he saw her at the window above him, her waist on a level with his head; flushed, with her grey eyes ominously bright, her full lips parted. And he said:

"What is it, Nell?"

She leaned down and caught his hand; her touch was fiery hot.

"He kissed me! I won't let him—I won't kiss him!"

Through his head went a medley of sayings to soothe children who are hurt; but he felt unsteady, unlike himself. And suddenly she knelt, and put her hot forehead against his lips.

It was as if she had really been a little child, wanting the place kissed to make it well.

VII

After that strange outburst, Lennan considered long whether he should speak to Oliver. But what could he say, from what standpoint say it, and—with what feeling? Or should he speak to Dromore? Not very easy to speak on such a subject to one off whose turf all spiritual matters were so permanently warned. Nor somehow could he bring himself to tell Sylvia; it would be like violating a confidence to speak of the child's outburst and that quivering moment, when she had kneeled and put her hot forehead to his lips for comfort. Such a disclosure was for Nell herself to make, if she so wished.

And then young Oliver solved the difficulty by coming to the studio himself next day. He entered with "Dromore" composure, very well groomed, in a silk hat, a cut-away black coat and charming lemon-coloured gloves; what, indeed, the youth did, besides belonging to the yeomanry and hunting all the winter, seemed known only to himself. He made no excuse for interrupting Lennan, and for some time sat silently smoking his cigarette, and pulling the ears of the dogs. And Lennan worked on, waiting. There was always something attractive to him in this young man's broad, good-looking face, with its crisp dark hair, and half-insolent good humour, now so clouded.

At last Oliver got up, and went over to the unfinished "Girl on the Magpie Horse." Turning to it so that his face could not be seen, he said:

"You and Mrs. Lennan have been awfully kind to me; I behaved rather like a cad yesterday. I thought I'd better tell you. I want to marry Nell, you know."

Lennan was glad that the young man's face was so religiously averted. He let his hands come to anchor on what he was working at before he answered: "She's only a child, Oliver;" and then, watching his fingers making an inept movement with the clay, was astonished at himself.

"She'll be eighteen this month," he heard Oliver say. "If she once gets out—amongst people—I don't know what I shall do. Old Johnny's no good to look after her."

The young man's face was very red; he was forgetting to hide it now. Then it went white, and he said through clenched

teeth: "She sends me mad! I don't know how not to—— If I don't get her, I shall shoot myself. I shall, you know—I'm that sort. It's her eyes. They draw you right out of yourself—and leave you——" And from his gloved hand the smoked-out cigarette-end fell to the floor. "They say her mother was like that. Poor old Johnny! D'you think I've got a chance, Mr. Lennan? I don't mean now, this minute; I know she's too young!"

Lennan forced himself to answer.

"I dare say, my dear fellow, I dare say. Have you talked with my wife?"

Oliver shook his head.

"She's so good—I don't think she'd quite understand my sort of feeling."

A queer little smile came up on Lennan's lips.

"Ah, well!" he said, "you must give the child time. Perhaps when she comes back from Ireland, after the summer."

The young man answered moodily:

"Yes. I've got the run of that, you know. And I shan't be able to keep away." He took up his hat. "I suppose I oughtn't to have come and bored you about this, but Nell thinks such a lot of you; and, you being different to most people—I thought you wouldn't mind." He turned again at the door. "It wasn't gas what I said just now—about not getting her. Fellows say that sort of thing, but I mean it."

He put on that shining hat and went.

And Lennan stood, staring at the statuette. So! Passion broke down even the defences of Dromoredom. Passion! Strange hearts it chose to bloom in!

"Being different to most people—I thought you wouldn't mind!" How had this youth known that Sylvia would not understand passion so out of hand as this? And what had made it clear that he (Lennan) would? Was there, then, something in his face? There must be! Even Johnny Dromore—most reticent of creatures—had confided to him the story of that hour when the wind had swept him out to sea!

Yes! And this statuette would never be any good, try as he might. Oliver was right—it was her eyes! How they had smoked—in their childish anger—if eyes could be said to smoke, and how they had drawn and pleaded when she put her face to his in her still more childish entreaty! If they were like this now, what would they be when the woman in

her woke? Just as well not to think of her too much! Just as well to work, and take heed that he would soon be forty-seven! Just as well that next week she would be gone to Ireland!

And the last evening before she went they took her to see "Carmen" at the Opera. He remembered that she wore a nearly high white frock, and a dark carnation in the ribbon tying her crinkly hair, still hanging loose. How wonderfully entranced she sat, drunk on an opera which he himself had seen a score of times; touching his arm, and Sylvia's, whispering questions: "Who's that?" "What's coming now?" The Carmen roused her to adoration, but Don José was "too fat in his funny little coat," till, in the maddened jealousy of the last act, he rose superior. Then, quite lost in excitement, she clutched Lennan's hand; and her gasp, when Carmen at last fell dead, made all their neighbours jump. Her emotion was far more moving than that on the stage; he wanted badly to stroke, and comfort her and say: "There, there, my dear, it's only make-believe!" And, when it was over, and the excellent murdered lady and her poor fat little lover appeared before the curtain, finally forgetting that she was a woman of the world, she started forward in her seat and clapped, and clapped. Fortunate that Johnny Dromore was not there to see! But all things coming to an end, they had to get up and go. And, as they made their way out to the hall, Lennan felt a hot little finger crooked into his own, as if she simply must have something to squeeze. He really did not know what to do with it. She seemed to feel this half-heartedness, soon letting it go. All the way home in the cab she was silent. With that same abstraction she ate her sandwiches and drank her lemonade; took Sylvia's kiss, and, quite a woman of the world once more, begged that they would not get up to see her off—for she was to go at seven in the morning, to catch the Irish mail. Then, holding out her hand to Lennan, she very gravely said:

"Thanks most awfully for taking me to-night. Good-bye!"

He stayed full half an hour at the window, smoking. No street lamp shone just there, and the night was velvety black above the plane-trees. At last, with a sigh, he shut up, and went tiptoeing upstairs in darkness. Suddenly in the corridor the white wall seemed to move at him. A warmth, a fragrance, a sound like a tiny sigh, and something soft was

squeezed into his hand. Then the wall moved back, and he stood listening—no sound, no anything! But in his dressing-room he looked at the soft thing in his hand. It was the carnation from her hair. What had possessed the child to give him that? Carmen! Ah! Carmen! And gazing at the flower, he held it away from him with a sort of terror; but its scent arose. And suddenly he thrust it, all fresh as it was, into a candle-flame, and held it, burning, writhing, till it blackened to velvet. Then his heart smote him for so cruel a deed. It was still beautiful, but its scent was gone. And turning to the window he flung it far out into the darkness.

VIII

Now that she was gone, it was curious how little they spoke of her, considering how long she had been with them. And they had from her but one letter written to Sylvia, very soon after she left, ending: "Dad sends his best respects, please; and with my love to you and Mr. Lennan, and all the beasts. —Nell.

"Oliver is coming here next week. We are going to some races."

It was difficult, of course, to speak of her, with that episode of the flower, too bizarre to be told—the sort of thing Sylvia would see out of all proportion—as, indeed, any woman might. Yet—what had it really been, but the uncontrolled impulse of an emotional child longing to express feelings kindled by the excitement of that opera? What but a child's feathery warmth, one of those flying peeps at the mystery of passion which young things take? He could not give away that pretty foolishness. And because he would not give it away, he was more than usually affectionate to Sylvia.

They had made no holiday plans, and he eagerly fell in with her suggestion that they should go down to Hayle. There, if anywhere, this curious restlessness would leave him. They had not been down to the old place for many years; indeed, since Gordy's death it was generally let.

They left London late in August. The day was closing in when they arrived. Honeysuckle had long been improved away away from that station paling, against which he had stood twenty-eight years ago, watching the train carrying Anna Stormer away. In the hired fly Sylvia pressed close to him, and held his hand beneath the ancient dust-rug. Both felt the same excitement at seeing again this old home. Not a single soul of the past days would be there now—only the house and the trees, the owls and the stars; the river, park, and logan stone! It was dark when they arrived; just their bedroom and two sitting-rooms had been made ready, with fires burning, though it was still high summer. The same old execrable Heatherleys looked down from the black oak panellings. The same scent of apples and old mice clung here and

there about the dark corridors with their unexpected stairways. It was all curiously unchanged, as old houses are when they are let furnished.

Once in the night he woke. Through the wide-open, uncurtained windows the night was simply alive with stars, such swarms of them swinging and trembling up there; and, far away, rose the melancholy, velvet-soft hooting of an owl.

Sylvia's voice, close to him, said:

"Mark, that night when your star caught in my hair? Do you remember?"

Yes, he remembered. And in his drowsy mind just roused from dreams, there turned and turned the queer nonsensical refrain: "I never—never—will desert Mr. Micawber. . . ."

A pleasant month that—of reading, and walking with the dogs the country round, of lying out long hours amongst the boulders or along the river banks, watching beasts and birds.

The little old green-house temple of his early masterpieces was still extant, used now to protect watering pots. But no vestige of impulse towards work came to him down there. He was marking time; not restless, not bored, just waiting—but for what, he had no notion. And Sylvia, at any rate, was happy, blooming in these old haunts, losing her fairness in the sun; even taking again to a sunbonnet, which made her look extraordinarily young. The trout that poor old Gordy had so harried were left undisturbed. No gun was fired; rabbits, pigeons, even the few partridges enjoyed those first days of autumn unmolested. The bracken and leaves turned very early, so that the park in the hazy September sunlight had an almost golden hue. A gentle mellowness reigned over all that holiday. And from Ireland came no further news, save one picture postcard with the words: "This is our house.—Nell."

In the last week of September they went back to London. And at once there began in him again that restless, unreasonable aching—that sense of being drawn away out of himself; so that he once more took to walking the Park for hours, over grass already strewn with leaves, always looking—craving—and for what?

At Dromore's the confidential man did not know when his master would be back; he had gone to Scotland with Miss Nell after the St. Leger. Was Lennan disappointed? Not so—relieved, rather. But his ache was there all the time, feeding

on its secrecy and loneliness, unmentionable feeling that it was. Why had he not realised long ago that youth was over, passion done with, autumn upon him? How never grasped the fact that "Time steals away"? And, as before, the only refuge was in work. The sheep-dogs and "The Girl on the Magpie Horse" were finished. He began a fantastic "relief"—a nymph peering from behind a rock, and a wild-eyed man creeping, through reeds, towards her. If he could put into the nymph's face something of this lure of Youth and Life and Love that was dragging at him, into the man's face the state of his own heart, it might lay that feeling to rest. Anything to get it out of himself! And he worked furiously, laboriously, all October, making no great progress. . . . What could he expect when Life was all the time knocking with a muffled tapping at his door?

It was on the Tuesday, after the close of the last Newmarket meeting, and just getting dusk, when Life opened the door and walked in. She wore a dark-red dress, a new one, and surely her face—her figure—were very different from what he had remembered! They had quickened and become poignant. She was no longer a child—that was at once plain. Cheeks, mouth, neck, waist—all seemed fined, shaped; the crinkly, light-brown hair was coiled up now under a velvet cap; only the great grey eyes seemed quite the same. And at sight of her his heart gave a sort of dive and flight, as if all its vague and wistful sensations had found their goal.

Then, in sudden agitation, he realised that his last moment with this girl—now a child no longer—had been a secret moment of warmth and of emotion; a moment which to her might have meant, in her might have bred, feelings that he had no inkling of. He tried to ignore that flighting and diving of his heart, held out his hand, and murmured:

"Ah, Nell! Back at last! You've grown."

Then, with a sensation of every limb gone weak, he felt her arms round his neck, and herself pressed against him. There was time for the thought to flash through him: 'This is terrible!' He gave her a little convulsive squeeze—could a man do less?—then just managed to push her gently away, trying with all his might to think: 'She's a child! It's nothing more than after Carmen! She doesn't know what I am feeling!' But he was conscious of a mad desire to clutch her to him. The touch of her had demolished all his vagueness,

made things only too plain, set him on fire. He said uncertainly:

"Come to the fire, my child, and tell me all about it."

If he did not keep to the notion that she was just a child, his head would go. Perdita—"the lost one"! A good name for her, indeed, as she stood there, her eyes shining in the firelight—more mesmeric than ever they had been! And, to get away from the lure of those eyes, he bent down and raked the grate, saying:

"Have you seen Sylvia?" But he knew that she had not, even before she gave that impatient shrug. Then he pulled himself together, and said:

"What has happened to you, child?"

"I'm not a child."

"No, we've both grown older. I was forty-seven the other day."

She caught his hand—Heavens! how supple she was!—and murmured:

"You're not old a bit; you're quite young."

At his wits' end, with his heart thumping, but still keeping his eyes away from her, he said:

"Where is Oliver?"

She dropped his hand at that.

"Oliver? I hate him!"

Afraid to trust himself near her, he had begun walking up and down. And she stood, following him with her gaze—the firelight playing on her red frock. What extraordinary stillness! What power she had developed in these few months! Had he let her see that he felt that power? And had all this come of one little moment in a dark corridor, of one flower pressed into his hand? Why had he not spoken to her roughly then—told her she was a romantic little fool? God knew what thoughts she had been feeding on! But who could have supposed—who dreamed——? And again he fixed his mind resolutely on that thought: 'She's a child—only a child!'

"Come!" he said: "tell me all about your time in Ireland?"

"Oh! it was just dull—it's all been dull away from you."

It came out without hesitancy or shame, and he could only murmur:

"Ah! you've missed your drawing!"

"Yes. Can I come to-morrow?"

That was the moment to have said: No! You are a foolish

child, and I am an elderly idiot! But he had neither courage nor clearness of mind enough; nor—the desire. And, without answering, he went towards the door to turn up the light.

"Oh, no! please don't! It's so nice like this!"

The shadowy room, the bluish dusk painted on all the windows, the fitful shining of the fire, the pallor and darkness of the dim casts and bronzes, and that one glowing figure there before the hearth! And her voice, a little piteous, went on:

"Aren't you glad I'm back? I can't see you properly out there."

He went back into the glow, and she gave a little sigh of satisfaction. Then her calm young voice said, ever so distinctly:

"Oliver wants me to marry him, and I won't, of course."

He dared not say: Why not? He dared not say anything. It was too dangerous. And then followed those amazing words: "You know why, don't you? Of course you do."

It was ridiculous, almost shameful to understand their meaning. And he stood, staring in front of him, without a word; humility, dismay, pride, and a sort of mad exultation, all mixed and seething within him in the queerest pudding of emotion. But all he said was:

"Come, my child; we're neither of us quite ourselves to-night. Let's go to the drawing-room."

IX

Back in the darkness and solitude of the studio, when she was gone, he sat down before the fire, his senses in a whirl. Why was he not just an ordinary animal of a man who could enjoy what the gods had sent? It was as if on a November day someone had pulled aside the sober curtains of the sky and there in a chink had been April standing—thick white blossom, a purple cloud, a rainbow, grass vivid green, light flaring from one knew not where, and such a tingling passion of life on it all as made the heart stand still! This, then, was the marvellous, enchanting, maddening end of all that year of restlessness and wanting! This bit of Spring suddenly given to him in the midst of Autumn. Her lips, her eyes, her hair; her touching confidence; above all—quite unbelievable—her love. Not really love perhaps, just childish fancy. But on the wings of fancy this child would fly far, too far—all wistfulness and warmth beneath that light veneer of absurd composure.

To live again—to plunge back into youth and beauty—to feel Spring once more—to lose the sense of all being over, save just the sober jog-trot of domestic bliss; to know, actually to know, ecstasy again, in the love of a girl; to rediscover all that youth yearns for, and feels, and hopes, and dreads, and loves. It was a prospect to turn the head even of a decent man. . . .

By just closing his eyes he could see her standing there with the firelight glow on her red frock; could feel again the marvellous thrill when she pressed herself against him in the half-innocent, seducing moment when she first came in; could feel again her eyes drawing—drawing him! She was a witch, a grey-eyed, brown-haired witch—even unto her love of red. She had the witch's power of lighting fever in the veins. And he simply wondered at himself, that he had not, as she stood there in the firelight, knelt, and put his arms round her and pressed his face against her waist. Why had he not? But he did not want to think; the moment thought began he knew he must be torn this way and that, tossed here and there between reason and desire, pity and passion. Every sense struggled to keep him wrapped in the warmth and intoxication of this discovery that he, in the full of autumn, had awakened love in spring. It was

amazing that she could have this feeling; yet there was no mistake. Her manner to Sylvia just now had been almost dangerously changed; there had been a queer cold impatience in her look, frightening from one who but three months ago had been so affectionate. And, going away, she had whispered, with that old-trembling-up at him, as if offering to be kissed: "I may come, mayn't I? And don't be angry with me, please; I can't help it." A monstrous thing at his age to let a young girl love him—compromise her future! A monstrous thing by all the canons of virtue and gentility! And yet—her future?—with that nature—those eyes—that origin—with that father, and that home? But he would not—simply must not think!

Nevertheless, he showed the signs of thought, and badly; for after dinner Sylvia, putting her hand on his forehead, said:

"You're working too hard, Mark. You don't go out enough."

He held those fingers fast. Sylvia! No, indeed, he must not think! But he took advantage of her words, and said that he would go out and get some air.

He walked at a great pace—to keep thought away—till he reached the river close to Westminster, and, moved by sudden impulse, seeking perhaps an antidote, turned down into that little street under the big Wren church, where he had never been since the summer night when he lost what was then more to him than life. There *she* had lived; there was the house—those windows which he had stolen past and gazed at with such distress and longing. Who lived there now? Once more he seemed to see that face out of the past, the dark hair, and dark soft eyes, and sweet gravity; and it did not reproach him. For this new feeling was not a love like that had been. Only once could a man feel the love passing all things, the love before which the world was but a spark in a draught of wind; the love that, whatever dishonour, grief, and unrest it might come through alone had in it the heart of peace and joy and honour. Fate had torn that love from him, nipped it off as a sharp wind nips off a perfect flower. This new feeling was but a fever, a passionate fancy, a grasping once more at Youth and Warmth. Ah, well! but it was real enough! And, in one of those moments when a man stands outside himself, seems to be lifted away and see his own life twirling, Lennan had a vision of a shadow driven here and there; a straw going round and round; a midge in the grip of a mad wind. Where was the home of this mighty secret feeling which sprang so suddenly out of the

dark, and caught you by the throat? Why did it come now and not then, for this one and not that other? What did man know of it, save that it made him spin and hover—like a moth intoxicated by a light, or a bee by some dark sweet flower; save that it made of him a distraught, humble, eager puppet of its fancy? Had it not once already driven him even to the edge of death; and must it now come on him again with its sweet madness, its drugging scent? What was it? Why was it? Why these passionate obsessions which could not decently be satisfied? Had civilisation so outstripped man that his nature was cramped into shoes too small—like the feet of a Chinese woman? What was it? Why was it?

And faster than ever he walked away.

Pall Mall brought him back to that counterfeit presentment of the real—reality. There, in St. James's Street, was Johnny Dromore's Club; and, again moved by impulse, he pushed open its swing door. No need to ask; for there was Dromore in the hall, on his way from dinner to the card-room. The glossy tan of hard exercise and good living lay on his cheeks as thick as clouted cream. His eyes had the peculiar shine of superabundant vigour; a certain sub-festive air in face and voice and movements suggested that he was going to make a night of it. And the sardonic thought flashed through Lennan: Shall I tell him?

"Hallo, old chap! Awfully glad to see you! What you doin' with yourself? Workin' hard? How's your wife? You been away? Been doin' anything great?" And then the question that would have given him his chance, if he had liked to be so cruel:

"Seen Nell?"

"Yes, she came round this afternoon."

"What d'you think of her? Comin' on nicely, isn't she?"

That old query, half furtive and half proud, as much as to say: "I know she's not in the studbook, but, d——n it, I sired her!" And then the old sudden gloom, which lasted but a second, and gave way again to chaff.

Lennan stayed very few minutes. Never had he felt farther from his old school-chum.

No. Whatever happened, Johnny Dromore must be left out. It was a position he had earned with his goggling eyes, and his astute philosophy; from it he should not be disturbed.

He passed along the railings of the Green Park. On the

cold air of this last October night a thin haze hung, and the acrid fragrance from little bonfires of fallen leaves. What was there about that scent of burned-leaf smoke which had always moved him so? Symbol of parting!—most mournful thing in all the world. For what would even death be, but for parting? Sweet, long sleep, or new adventure. But, if a man loved others —to leave them, or be left! Ah! and it was not death only that brought partings!

He came to the opening of the street where Dromore lived. She would be there, sitting by the fire in the big chair, playing with her kitten, thinking, dreaming, and—alone! He passed on at such a pace that people stared; till, turning the last corner for home, he ran almost into the arms of Oliver Dromore.

The young man was walking with unaccustomed indecision, his fur coat open, his opera-hat pushed up on his crisp hair. Dark under the eyes, he had not the proper gloss of a Dromore at this season of the year.

"Mr. Lennan! I've just been round to you."

And Lennan answered dazedly:

"Will you come in, or shall I walk your way a bit?"

"I'd rather—out here, if you don't mind."

So in silence they went back into the Square. And Oliver said:

"Let's get over by the rails."

They crossed to the railings of the Square's dark garden, where nobody was passing. And with every step Lennan's humiliation grew. There was something false and undignified in walking with this young man who had once treated him as a father confessor to his love for Nell. And suddenly he perceived that they had made a complete circuit of the Square garden without speaking a single word.

"Yes?" he said.

Oliver turned his face away.

"You remember what I told you in the summer? Well, it's worse now. I've been going a mucker lately in all sorts of ways to try and get rid of it. But it's all no good. She's got me!"

And Lennan thought: 'You're not alone in that!' But he kept silence. His chief dread was of saying something that he would remember afterwards as the words of Judas.

Then Oliver suddenly burst out:

"Why can't she care? I suppose I'm nothing much, but she's known me all her life, and she used to like me. There's

something—I can't make out. Could you do anything for me with her?"

Lennan pointed across the street.

"In every other one of those houses, Oliver," he said, "there's probably some creature who can't make out why another creature doesn't care. Passion comes when it will, goes when it will; and we poor devils have no say in it."

"What do you advise me, then?"

Lennan had an almost overwhelming impulse to turn on his heel and leave the young man standing there. But he forced himself to look at his face, which even then had its attraction—perhaps more so than ever, so pallid and desperate it was. And he said slowly, staring mentally at every word:

"I'm not up to giving you advice. The only thing I might say is: One does not press oneself where one isn't wanted; all the same—who knows? So long as she feels you're there, waiting, she might turn to you at any moment. The more chivalrous you are, Oliver, the more patiently you wait, the better chance you have."

Oliver took those words of little comfort without flinching. "I see," he said. "Thanks! But, my God! it's hard. I never could wait." And with that epigram on himself, holding out his hand, he turned away.

Lennan went slowly home, trying to gauge exactly how anyone who knew all would judge him. It was a little difficult in this affair to keep a shred of dignity.

Sylvia had not gone up, and he saw her looking at him anxiously. The one strange comfort in all this was that his feeling for her, at any rate, had not changed. It seemed even to have deepened—to be more real to him.

How could he help staying awake that night? How could he help thinking, then? And long time he lay, staring at the dark.

As if thinking were any good for fever in the veins!

"Que désirez-vous, monsieur? Des œillets rouges—j'en ai de bien beaux, ce soir."

Des œillets rouges? Yes, those to-night! To this address. No green with them; no card!

How strange the feeling—with the die once cast for love—of rushing, of watching his own self being left behind!

In the Brompton Road, outside a little restaurant, a thin musician was playing on a violin. Ah! and he knew this place; he would go in there, not to the Club—and the fiddler should have all he had to spare, for playing those tunes of love. He turned in. He had not been there since the day before that night on the river, twenty years ago. Never since; and yet it was not changed. The same tarnished gilt, and smell of cooking; the same macaroni in the same tomato sauce; the same Chianti flasks; the same staring, light-blue walls wreathed with pink flowers. Only the waiter different—hollow-cheeked, patient, dark of eye. He, too, should be well tipped! And that poor, overhatted lady, eating her frugal meals—to her, at all events, a look of kindness. For all desperate creatures he must feel, this desperate night! And suddenly he thought of Oliver. Another desperate one! What should he say to Oliver at this dance—he, aged forty-seven, coming there without his wife! Some imbecility, such as: "Watching the human form divine in motion," "Catching sidelights on Nell for the statuette"—some cant; it did not matter! The wine was drawn, and he must drink!

It was still early when he left the restaurant—a dry night, very calm, not cold. When had he danced last? With Olive Cramier, before he knew he loved her. Well, *that* memory could not be broken, for he would not dance to-night! Just watch, sit with the girl a few minutes, feel her hand cling to his, see her eyes turned back to him; and—come away! And then—the future! For the wine was drawn! The leaf of a plane-tree, fluttering down, caught on his sleeve. Autumn would soon be gone, and after Autumn—only Winter! She would have done with him long before he came to Winter. Nature would see to it that Youth called for her, and carried her away. Nature in her courses! But just to cheat Nature for a little while! To cheat Nature—what greater happiness!

Here was the place, with red-striped awning, carriages driving away, loiterers watching. He turned in, with a beating heart. Was he before her? How would she come to this first dance?

With Oliver alone? Or had some chaperon been found? To have come because she—this child so lovely, born "outside"—might have need of chaperonage, would have been some comfort to dignity, so wistful, so lost as his. But, alas! he knew he was only there because he could not keep away!

Already they were dancing in the hall up-stairs; but not she, yet; and he stood leaning against the wall where she must pass. Lonely and out of place he felt; as if everyone must know why he was there. People stared, and he heard a girl ask: "Who's that against the wall with the hair and dark moustache?"—and her partner murmuring his answer, and her voice again: "Yes, he looks as if he were seeing sand and lions." For whom, then, did they take him? Thank heaven! They were all the usual sort. There would be no one that he knew. Suppose Johnny Dromore himself came with Nell! He was to be back on Saturday! What could he say, then? How meet those doubting, knowing eyes, goggling with the fixed philosophy, that a man has but one use for woman? God! and it would be true! For a moment he was on the point of getting his coat and hat, and sneaking away. That would mean not seeing her till Monday; and he stood his ground. But after to-night there must be no more such risks—their meetings must be wisely planned, must sink underground. And then he saw her at the foot of the stairs in a dress of a shell-pink colour, with one of his flowers in her light-brown hair and the others tied to the handle of a tiny fan. How self-possessed she looked, as if this were indeed her native element—her neck and arms bare, her cheeks a deep soft pink, her eyes quickly turning here and there. She began mounting the stairs, and saw him. Was ever anything so lovely as she looked just then? Behind her he marked Oliver, and a tall girl with red hair, and another young man. He moved deliberately to the top of the stairs on the wall side, so that from behind they should not see her face when she greeted him. She put the little fan with the flowers to her lips; and, holding out her hand, said, quick and low:

"The fourth, it's a polka; we'll sit out, won't we?"

Then swaying a little, so that her hair and the flower in it almost touched his face, she passed, and there in her stead stood Oliver.

Lennan had expected one of his old insolent looks, but the young man's face was eager and quite friendly.

"It was awfully good of you to come, Mr. Lennan. Is Mrs. Lennan——"

And Lennan murmured:

"She wasn't able; she's not quite——" and could have sunk into the shining floor. Youth with its touching confidence, its eager trust! This was the way he was fulfilling his duty towards Youth!

When they had passed into the ballroom he went back to his position against the wall. They were dancing Number Three; his time of waiting, then, was drawing to a close. From where he stood he could not see the dancers—no use to watch her go round in someone else's arms.

Not a true waltz—some French or Spanish pavement song played in waltz time; bizarre, pathetic, whirling after its own happiness. That chase for happiness! Well, life, with all its prizes and its possibilities, had nothing that quite satisfied—save just the fleeting moments of passion! Nothing else quite poignant enough to be called pure joy! Or so it seemed to him.

The waltz was over. He could see her now, on a rout seat against the wall with the other young man, turning her eyes constantly as if to make sure that he was still standing there. What subtle fuel was always being added to the fire by that flattery of her inexplicable adoration—of those eyes which dragged him to her, yet humbly followed him, too! Five times while she sat there he saw the red-haired girl or Oliver bring men up; saw youths cast longing glances; saw girls watching her with cold appraisement, or with a touching, frank delight. From the moment that she came in, there had been, in her father's phrase, "only one in it." And she could pass all this by, and still want him. Incredible!

At the first notes of the polka he went to her. It was she who found their place of refuge—a little alcove behind two palm-plants. But sitting there, he realised, as never before, that there was no spiritual communion between him and this child. She could tell him her troubles or her joys; he could soothe or sympathize; but never would the gap between their natures and their ages be crossed. His happiness was only in the sight and touch of her. But that, God knew, was happiness enough—a feverish, craving joy, like an overtired man's thirst, growing with the drink on which it tries to slake itself. Sitting there, in the scent of those flowers and of some sweet essence in her hair, with her fingers touching his, and her eyes seeking his,

he tried loyally not to think of himself, to grasp her sensations at this her first dance, and just help her to enjoyment. But he could not—paralysed, made drunk by that insensate longing to take her in his arms and crush her to him as he had those few hours back. He could see her expanding like a flower, in all this light, and motion, and intoxicating admiration round her. What business had he in her life, with his dark hunger after secret hours; he—a coin worn thin already—a destroyer of the freshness and the glamour of her youth and beauty!

Then, holding up the flowers, she said:

"Did you give me these because of the one I gave you?"

"Yes."

"What did you do with that?"

"Burned it."

"Oh! but why?"

"Because you are a witch—and witches must be burned with all their flowers."

"Are you going to burn me?"

He put his hand on her cool arm.

"Feel! The flames are lighted."

"You may! I don't care!"

She took his hand and laid her cheek against it; yet, to the music, which had begun again, the tip of her shoe was already beating time. And he said:

"You ought to be dancing, child."

"Oh, no! Only it's a pity you don't want to."

"Yes! Do you understand that it must all be secret—underground?"

She covered his lips with the fan, and said: "You're not to think; you're not to think—never! When can I come?"

"I must find the best way. Not to-morrow. Nobody must know, Nell—for your sake—for hers—nobody!"

She nodded, and repeated with a soft, mysterious wisdom: "Nobody." And then, aloud: "Here's Oliver! It was awfully good of you to come. Good-night!"

And as, on Oliver's arm, she left their little refuge, she looked back.

He lingered—to watch her through this one dance. How they made all the other couples sink into insignificance, with that something in them both that was better than mere good looks—that something not *outré* or eccentric, but poignant, wayward. They went well together, those two Dromores—his dark head

and her fair head; his clear, brown, daring eyes, and her grey, languorous, mesmeric eyes. Ah! Master Oliver was happy now, with her so close to him! It was not jealousy that Lennan felt. Not quite—one did not feel jealous of the young; something very deep—pride, sense of proportion, who knew what?—prevented that. She, too, looked happy, as if her soul were dancing, vibrating with this music and the scent of the flowers. He waited for her to come round once more, to get for a last time that flying glance turned back; then found his coat and hat and went.

XIII

Outside, he walked a few steps, then stood looking back at the windows of the hall through some trees, the shadows of whose trunks, in the light of a street lamp, were spilled out along the ground like the splines of a fan. A church clock struck eleven. For hours yet she would be there, going round and round in the arms of Youth! Try as he might he could never recapture for himself the look that Oliver's face had worn —a look which was the symbol of so much more than he himself could give her. Why had she come into his life—to her undoing and his own? And the bizarre thought came to him: 'If she were dead should I really care? Should I not be almost glad? If she were dead her witchery would be dead, and I could stand up straight again and look people in the face!' What was this power that played with men, darted into them, twisted their hearts to rags; this power that had looked through her eyes when she put her fan, with his flowers, to her lips?

The thrumming of the music ceased; he walked away.

It must have been nearly twelve when he reached home. Now, once more, would begin the gruesome process of deception—flinching of soul, and brazening of visage. It would be better when the whole thievish business was irretrievably begun and ordered in its secret courses!

There was no light in the drawing-room, save just the glow of the fire. If only Sylvia might have gone to bed! Then he saw her, sitting motionless out there by the uncurtained window.

He went over to her, and began his hateful formula:

"I'm afraid you've been lonely. I had to stay rather late. A dull evening." And, since she did not move or answer, but just sat there very still and white, he forced himself to go close, bend down to her, touch her cheek; even to kneel beside her. She looked round then; her face was quiet enough, but her eyes were strangely eager. With a pitiful little smile she broke out:

"Oh, Mark! What is it—what is it? Anything is better than this!"

Perhaps it was the smile, perhaps her voice or eyes—but something gave way in Lennan. Secrecy, precaution went by

the board. Bowing his head against her breast, he poured it all out, while they clung, clutched together in the half dark like two frightened children. Only when he had finished did he realise that if she had pushed him away, refused to let him touch her, it would have been far less piteous, far easier to bear, than her wan face and her hands clutching him, and her words: "I never thought—you and I—oh! Mark—you and I——" The trust in their life together, in himself, that those words revealed! Yet, not greater than he had had—still had! She could not understand—he had known that she could never understand; it was why he had fought so for secrecy, all through. She was taking it as if she had lost everything; and in his mind she had lost nothing. This passion, this craving for Youth and Life, this madness—call it what one would—was something quite apart, not touching his love and need of her. If she would only believe that! Over and over he repeated it; over and over again perceived that she could not take it in. The only thing she saw was that his love had gone from her to another—though that was not true! Suddenly she broke out of his arms, pushing him from her, and cried: "That girl—hateful, horrible, false!" Never had he seen her look like this, with flaming spots in her white cheeks, soft lips and chin distorted, blue eyes flaming, breast heaving, as if each breath were drawn from lungs which received no air. And then, as quickly, the fire went out of her; she sank down on the sofa, covering her face with her arms, rocking to and fro. She did not cry, but a little moan came from her now and then. And each one of those sounds was to Lennan like the cry of something he was murdering. At last he went and sat down on the sofa by her and said:

"Sylvia! Sylvia! Don't! oh! don't!" And she was silent, ceasing to rock herself; letting him smooth and stroke her. But her face she kept hidden, and only once she spoke, so low that he could hardly hear: "I can't—I won't keep you from her." And with the awful feeling that no words could reach or soothe the wound in that tender heart, he could only go on stroking and kissing her hands.

It was atrocious—horrible—this that he had done! God knew that he had not sought it—the thing had come on him. Surely even in her misery she could see that! Deep down beneath his grief and self-hatred, he knew, what neither she nor anyone else could know—that he could not have prevented this feeling, which went back to days before he ever saw the girl—that no

man could have stopped that feeling in himself. This craving and roving was as much part of him as his eyes and hands, as overwhelming and natural a longing as his hunger for work, or his need of the peace that Sylvia gave, and alone could give him. That was the tragedy—it was all sunk and rooted in the very nature of a man. Since the girl had come into their lives he was no more unfaithful to his wife in thought than he had been before. If only she could look into him, see him exactly as he was, as, without part or lot in the process, he had been made—then she would understand, and even might not suffer; but she could not, and he could never make it plain. And solemnly, desperately, with a weary feeling of the futility of words, he went on trying: Could she not see? It was all a thing outside him—a craving, a chase after beauty and life, after his own youth! At that word she looked at him:

"And do you think *I* don't want my youth back?"

He stopped.

For a woman to feel that her beauty—the brightness of her hair and eyes, the grace and suppleness of her limbs—were slipping from her and from the man she loved! Was anything more bitter?—or any more sacred duty than not to add to that bitterness, not to push her with suffering into old age, but to help keep the star of her faith in her charm intact!

Man and woman—they both wanted youth again; she, that she might give it all to him; he, because it would help him towards something—new! Just that world of difference!

He got up, and said:

"Come, dear, let's try and sleep."

He had not once said that he could give it up. The words would not pass his lips, though he knew she must be conscious that he had not said them, must be longing to hear them. All he had been able to say was:

"So long as you want me, you shall never lose me" . . . and, "I will never keep anything from you again."

Up in their room she lay hour after hour in his arms, quite unresentful, but without life in her, and with eyes, when his lips touched them, always wet.

What a maze was a man's heart, wherein he must lose himself every minute! What involved and intricate turnings and turnings on itself; what fugitive replacement of emotion by emotion! What strife between pities and passions; what longing for peace! . . .

And in his feverish exhaustion, which was almost sleep, Lennan hardly knew whether it was the thrum of music or Sylvia's moaning that he heard; her body or Nell's within his arms. . . .

But life had to be lived, a face preserved against the world, engagements kept. And the nightmare went on for both of them, under the calm surface of an ordinary Sunday. They were like people walking at the edge of a high cliff, not knowing from step to step whether they would fall; or like swimmers struggling for issue out of a dark whirlpool.

In the afternoon they went together to a concert. It was just something to do—something that saved them for an hour or two from the possibility of speaking on the one subject left to them. The ship had gone down, and they were clutching at anything which for a moment would help to keep them above water.

In the evening some people came to supper; a writer and two painters, with their wives. A grim evening—never more so than when the conversation turned on that perennial theme—the freedom, spiritual, mental, physical, requisite for those who practise Art. All the stale arguments were brought forth, and had to be joined in with unmoved faces. And for all their talk of freedom, Lennan could see the *volte-face* his friends would be making, if they only knew. It was not "the thing" to seduce young girls—as if, forsooth, there were freedom in doing only what people thought "the thing"! Their cant about the free artist spirit experiencing everything, would wither the moment it came up against a canon of "good form," so that in truth it was no freer than the bourgeois spirit, with its conventions; or the priest spirit, with its cry of "Sin!" No, no! To resist —if resistance were possible to this dragging power—maxims of "good form," dogmas of religion and morality, were no help—nothing was any help, but some feeling stronger than passion itself. Sylvia's face, forced to smile!—that indeed, was a reason why they should condemn him! None of their doctrines about freedom could explain that away—the harm, the death that came to a man's soul when he made a loving, faithful creature suffer.

But they were gone at last—with their "Thanks so much!" and their "Delightful evening!"

And those two were face to face for another night.

He knew that it must begin all over again—inevitable, after

the stab of that wretched argument plunged into their hearts and turned and turned all the evening.

"I won't, I mustn't keep you starved, and spoil your work. Don't think of me, Mark! I can bear it!"

And then a breakdown worse than the night before. What genius, what sheer genius Nature had for torturing her creatures! If anyone had told him, even so little as a week ago, that he could have caused such suffering to Sylvia—Sylvia, whom as a child with wide blue eyes and a blue bow on her flaxen head he had guarded across fields full of imaginary bulls; Sylvia, in whose hair his star had caught; Sylvia, who day and night for fifteen years, had been his devoted wife; whom he loved and still admired—he would have given him the lie direct. It would have seemed incredible, monstrous, silly. Had all married men and women such things to go through—was this but a very usual crossing of the desert? Or was it, once for all, shipwreck? death—unholy, violent death—in a storm of sand?

Another night of misery, and no answer to that question yet.

He had told her that he would not see Nell again without first letting her know. So, when morning came, he simply wrote the words: "Don't come to-day!"—showed them to Sylvia, and sent them by a servant to Dromore's.

Hard to describe the bitterness with which he entered his studio that morning. In all this chaos, what of his work? Could he ever have peace of mind for it again? Those people last night had talked of "inspiration of passion, of experience." In pleading with her he had used the words himself. She—poor soul!—had but repeated them, trying to endure them, to believe them true. And were they true? Again no answer, or certainly none that he could give. To have had the waters broken up; to be plunged into emotion; to feel desperately, instead of stagnating—some day he might be grateful—who knew? Some day there might be fair country again beyond this desert, where he could work even better than before. But just now, as well expect creative work from a condemned man. It seemed to him that he was equally destroyed whether he gave Nell up, and with her, once for all, that roving, seeking instinct, which ought, forsooth, to have been satisfied, and was not; or whether he took Nell, knowing that in doing so he was torturing a woman dear to him! That was as far as he could see to-day. What he would come to see in time God only knew! But: "Freedom of the Spirit!" A phrase of bitter irony

indeed! And, there, like a man tied hand and foot, with his work all round him, he was swept by such a feeling of exasperated rage as he had never known. Women! These women! Only let him be free of both, of all women, and the passions and pities they aroused, so that his brain and his hands might live and work again! They should not strangle, they should not destroy him!

Unfortunately, even in his rage, he knew that flight from them both could never help him. One way or the other the thing would have to be fought through. If it had been a straight fight even; a clear issue between passion and pity! But both he loved, and both he pitied! There was nothing straight and clear about it anywhere; it was all too deeply rooted in full human nature. And the appalling sense of rushing ceaselessly from barrier to barrier began really to affect his brain.

True, he had now and then a lucid interval of a few minutes, when the ingenious nature of his own torments struck him as supremely interesting and queer; but this was not precisely a relief, for it only meant, as in prolonged toothache, that his power of feeling had for a moment ceased. A very pretty little hell indeed!

All day he had the premonition, amounting to certainty, that Nell would take alarm at those three words he had sent her, and come in spite of them. And yet, what else could he have written? Nothing save what must have alarmed her more, or plunged him deeper. He had the feeling that she could follow his moods, that her eyes could see him everywhere, as a cat's eyes can see in darkness. The feeling had been with him, more or less, ever since the last evening of October, the evening she came back from her summer—grown-up. How long ago? Only six days—was it possible? Ah, yes! She knew when her spell was weakening, when the current wanted, as it were, renewing. And about six o'clock—dusk already—without the least surprise, with only a sort of empty quivering, he heard her knock. And just behind the closed door, as near as he could get to her, he stood, holding his breath. He had given his word to Sylvia—of his own accord had given it. Through the thin wood of the old door he could hear the faint shuffle of her feet on the pavement, moved a few inches this way and that, as though supplicating the inexorable silence. He seemed to see her head, bent a little forward, listening. Three times she knocked, and each time Lennan writhed. It was so cruel!

With that seeing-sense of hers she must know he was there; his very silence would be telling her—for his silence had its voice, its pitiful breathless sound. Then, quite distinctly, he heard her sigh, and her footsteps move away; and covering his face with his hands he rushed to and fro in the studio, like a madman.

No sound of her any more! Gone! It was unbearable; and, seizing his hat, he ran out. Which way? At random he ran towards the Square. There she was, over by the railing; languidly, irresolutely moving towards home.

XIV

But now that she was within reach, he wavered; he had given his word—was he going to break it? Then she turned, and saw him; he could not go back. In the biting easterly wind her face looked small, and pinched, and cold, but her eyes only the larger, the more full of witchery, as if beseeching him not to be angry, not to send her away.

"I had to come; I got frightened. Why did you write such a tiny little note?"

He tried to make his voice sound quiet and ordinary.

"You must be brave, Nell. I have had to tell her."

She clutched at his arm; then drew herself up, and said in her clear, clipped voice:

"Oh! I suppose she hates me, then!"

"She is terribly unhappy."

They walked a minute, that might have been an hour, without a word; not round the Square, as he had walked with Oliver, but away from the house. At last she said in a half-choked voice: "I only want a little bit of you."

And he answered dully: "In love, there are no little bits—no standing still."

Then, suddenly, he felt her hand in his, the fingers lacing, twining restlessly amongst his own; and again the half-choked voice said:

"But you *will* let me see you sometimes! You must!"

Hardest of all to resist was this pathetic, clinging, frightened child. And, not knowing very clearly what he said, he murmured:

"Yes—yes; it'll be all right. Be brave—you must be brave, Nell. It'll all come right."

But she only answered:

"No, no! I'm not brave. I shall do something."

Her face looked just as when she had ridden at that gravel pit. Loving, wild, undisciplined, without resource of any kind—what might she not do? Why could he not stir without bringing disaster upon one or other? And between these two, suffering so because of him, he felt as if he had lost his own existence. In quest of happiness, he had come to that!

Suddenly she said:

"Oliver asked me again at the dance on Saturday. He said you had told him to be patient. Did you?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"I was sorry for him."

She let his hand go.

"Perhaps you would like me to marry him."

Very clearly he saw those two going round and round over the shining floor.

"It would be better, Nell."

She made a little sound—of anger or dismay.

"You don't *really* want me, then?"

That was his chance. But with her arm touching his, her face so pale and desperate, and those maddening eyes turned to him, he could not tell that lie, and answered:

"Yes—I want you, God knows!"

At that a sigh of content escaped her, as if she were saying to herself: 'If he wants me he will not let me go.' Strange little tribute of her faith in love and her own youth!

They had come somehow to Pall Mall by now. And scared to find himself so deep in the hunting-ground of the Dromores, Lennan turned hastily towards St. James's Park, that they might cross it in the dark, round to Piccadilly. To be thus slinking out of the world's sight with the daughter of his old room-mate—of all men in the world the last perhaps that he should do this to! A nice treacherous business! But the thing men called honour—what was it, when her eyes were looking at him and her shoulder touching his?

Since he had spoken those words, "Yes, I want you," she had been silent—fearful perhaps to let other words destroy their comfort. But near the gate by Hyde Park Corner she put her hand again into his, and again her voice, so clear, said:

"I don't want to hurt anybody, but you *will* let me come sometimes—you will let me see you—you won't leave me all alone, thinking that I'll never see you again?"

And once more, without knowing what he answered, Lennan murmured:

"No, no! It'll be all right, dear—it'll all come right. It must—and shall."

Again her fingers twined amongst his, like a child's. She

seemed to have a wonderful knowledge of the exact thing to say and do to keep him helpless. And she went on:

"I didn't try to love you—it isn't wrong to love—it wouldn't hurt her. I only want a little of your love."

A little—always a little! But he was solely bent on comforting her now. To think of her going home, and sitting lonely, frightened, and unhappy, all the evening, was dreadful. And holding her fingers tight, he kept on murmuring words of would-be comfort.

Then he saw that they were out in Piccadilly. How far dared he go with her along the railings before he said good-bye? A man was coming towards them, just where he had met Dromore that first fatal afternoon nine months ago; a man with a slight lurch in his walk and a tall, shining hat a little on one side. But thank Heaven!—it was not Dromore—only one somewhat like him, who in passing stared sphinx-like at Nell. And Lennan said:

"You must go home now, child; we mustn't be seen together."

For a moment he thought she was going to break down, refuse to leave him. Then she threw up her head, and for a second stood like that, quite motionless, looking in his face. Suddenly stripping off her glove, she thrust her warm, clinging hand into his. Her lips smiled faintly, tears stood in her eyes; then she drew her hand away and plunged into the traffic. He saw her turn the corner of her street and disappear. And with the warmth of that passionate little hand still stinging his palm, he almost ran towards Hyde Park.

Taking no heed of direction, he launched himself into its dark space, deserted in this cold, homeless wind, of little sound and no scent, travelling its remorseless road under the grey-black sky.

The dark firmament and keen cold air suited one who had no need of aids to emotion—one who had, indeed, but the single wish to get rid, if he only could, of the terrible sensation in his head, that bruised, battered, imprisoned feeling of a man who paces his cell—never, never to get out at either end. Without thought or intention he drove his legs along; not running, because he knew that he would have to stop the sooner. Alas! what more comic spectacle for the eyes of a good citizen than this married man of middle age, striding for hours over those dry, dark, empty pastures—hunted by passion and by pity, so that he

knew not even whether he had dined! But no good citizen was abroad of an autumn night in a bitter easterly wind. The trees were the sole witnesses of this grim exercise—the trees, resigning to the cold blast their crinkled leaves fluttering past him, just a little lighter than the darkness. Here and there his feet rustled in the drifts, waiting their turn to serve the little bonfires, whose scent still clung in the air. A desperate walk, in this heart of London—round and round, up and down, hour after hour, keeping always in the dark; not a star in the sky, not a human being spoken to or even clearly seen, not a bird or beast; just the gleam of the lights far away, and the hoarse muttering of the traffic! A walk as lonely as the voyage of the human soul is lonely from birth to death with nothing to guide it but the flickering glow from its own frail spirit lighted it knows not where. . . .

And, so tired that he could hardly move his legs, but free at last of that awful feeling in his head—free for the first time for days and days—Lennan came out of the Park at the gate where he had gone in, and walked towards his home, certain that to-night, one way or the other, it would be decided. . . .

XV

This then—this long trouble of body and of spirit—was what he remembered, sitting in the armchair beyond his bedroom fire, watching the glow, and Sylvia sleeping there exhausted, while the dark plane-tree leaves tap-tapped at the window in the autumn wind; watching, with the uncanny certainty that he would not pass the limits of this night without having made at last a decision which should bind him. For even conflict wears itself out; even indecision has this measure set to its miserable powers of torture, that any issue in the end is better than the hell of indecision itself. Once or twice in those last days even death had seemed to him quite tolerable; but now that his head was clear and he had come to grips, death passed out of his mind like the shadow that it was. Nothing so simple, extravagant, and vain could serve him. Other issues had reality; death—none. To leave Sylvia, and take this young love away; there was reality in that, but it had always faded as soon as it shaped itself; and now once more it faded. To put such a public and terrible affront on a tender wife whom he loved, do her to death, as it were, before the world's eyes—and then, ever remorseful, grow old while the girl was still young? He could not. If Sylvia had not loved him, yes; or, even if he had not loved her; or if, again, though loving him she had stood upon her rights—in any of those events he might have done it. But to leave her whom he did love, and who had said to him so generously: "I will not hamper you—go to her"—would be a black atrocity. Every memory, from their boy-and-girl lovering to the desperate clinging of her arms these last two nights—memory with its innumerable tentacles, the invincible strength of its countless threads, bound him to her too fast. What then? Must it come, after all, to giving up the girl? And sitting there, by that warm fire, he shivered. How desolate, sacrilegious, wasteful to throw love away; to turn from the most precious of all gifts; to drop and break that vase! There was not too much love in the world, nor too much warmth and beauty—not, anyway, for those whose sands were running out, whose blood would soon be cold.

Could Sylvia not let him keep both her love and the girl's?

Could she not bear that? She had said she could; but her face, her eyes, her voice gave her the lie, so that every time he heard her his heart turned sick with pity. This, then, was the real issue. Could he accept from her such a sacrifice, exact a daily misery, see her droop and fade beneath it? Could he bear his own happiness at such a cost? Would it be happiness at all? He got up from the chair and crept towards her. She looked very fragile sleeping there! The darkness below her closed eyelids showed cruelly on that too fair skin; and in her flax-coloured hair he saw what he had never noticed—a few strands of white. Her softly opened lips, almost colourless, quivered with her uneven breathing; and now and again a little feverish shiver passed up as from her heart. All soft and fragile! Not much life, not much strength; youth and beauty slipping! To know that he who should be her champion against age and time would day by day be placing one more mark upon her face, one more sorrow in her heart! That he should do this—they both going down the years together!

As he stood there holding his breath, bending to look at her, that slurring swish of the plane-tree branch, flung against and against the window by the autumn wind, seemed filling the whole world. Then her lips moved in one of those little, soft hurrying whispers of unhappy dreamers, the words all blurred with their wistful rushing.

And he thought: 'I, who believe in bravery and kindness; I, who hate cruelty—if I do this cruel thing, what shall I have to live for; how shall I work; how bear myself? If I do it, I am lost—an outcast from my own faith—a renegade from all that I believe in.'

And, kneeling there close to that face so sad and lonely, that heart so beaten even in its sleep, he knew that he could not do it—knew it with sudden certainty, and a curious sense of peace. Over!—the long struggle—over at last! Youth with youth, summer to summer, falling leaf with falling leaf! And behind him the fire flickered, and the plane-tree leaves tap-tapped.

He rose, and crept away stealthily downstairs into the drawing-room, and through the window at the far end out into the courtyard, where he had sat that day by the hydrangea, listening to the piano-organ. Very dark and cold and eerie it was there, and he hurried across to his studio. There, too, it was cold, and dark, and eerie, with its ghostly plaster presences, stale

scent of cigarettes, and just one glowing ember of the fire he had left when he rushed out after Nell—those seven hours ago.

He went first to the bureau, turned up its lamp, and taking out some sheets of paper, marked on them directions for his various works; for the statuette of Nell, he noted that it should be taken with his compliments to Mr. Dromore. He wrote a letter to his banker directing money to be sent to Rome, and to his solicitor telling him to let the house. He wrote quickly. If Sylvia woke, and found him still away, what might she not think? He took a last sheet. Did it matter what he wrote, what deliberate lie, if it helped Nell over the first shock?

"Dear Nell,

"I write this hastily in the early hours, to say that we are called out to Italy to my only sister, who is very ill. We leave by the first morning boat, and may be away some time. I will write again. Don't fret, and God bless you.

"M. L."

He could not see very well as he wrote. Poor, loving, desperate child! Well, she had youth and strength, and would soon have—Oliver! And he took yet another sheet.

"Dear Oliver,

"My wife and I are obliged to go post-haste to Italy. I watched you both at the dance the other night. Be very gentle with Nell; and—good luck to you! But don't tell her again that I told you to be patient; it is hardly the way to make her love you.

"M. Lennan."

That, then, was all—yes, all! He turned out the little lamp, and groped towards the hearth. But one thing left. To say good-bye! To her, and Youth, and Passion!—to the only salve for the aching that Spring and Beauty bring—the aching for the wild, the passionate, the new, which never quite dies in a man's heart. Ah! well, sooner or later, all men had to say good-bye to that. All men—all men!

He crouched down before the hearth. There was no warmth in that fast-blackening ember, but it still glowed like a dark-red flower. And while it lived he crouched there, as though it were that to which he was saying good-bye. And on the door

he heard the girl's ghostly knocking. And beside him—a ghost among the ghostly presences—she stood. Slowly the glow blackened, till the last spark had faded out.

Then by the glimmer of the night he found his way back, softly as he had come, to his bedroom.

Sylvia was still sleeping; and, to watch for her to wake, he sat down again by the fire, in silence only stirred by the frail tap-tapping of those autumn leaves, and the little catch in her breathing now and then. It was less troubled than when he had bent over her before, as though in her sleep she knew. He must not miss the moment of her waking, must be beside her before she came to full consciousness, to say: "There, there! It's all over; we are going away at once—at once." To be ready to offer that quick solace, before she had time to plunge back into her sorrow, was an island in this black sea of night, a single little refuge point for his bereaved and naked being. Something to do—something fixed, real, certain. And yet another long hour before her waking, he sat forward in the chair, with that wistful eagerness, his eyes fixed on her face, staring through it at some vision, some faint, glimmering light—far out there beyond—as a traveller watches a star. . . .

1912-13.

BOOK II

BEYOND

"Che faro senza . . . "

TO

THOMAS HARDY

PART I

I

At the door of St. George's registry office Charles Clare Winton strolled forward in the wake of the taxi-cab that was bearing his daughter away with "the fiddler fellow" she had married. His sense of decorum forbade his walking with Nurse Betty—the only other witness of the wedding. A stout woman in a highly emotional condition would have companioned incongruously his slim, upright figure, moving with just that unexaggerated swing and balance becoming to a lancer of the old school, even if he has been on the retired list for sixteen years.

Poor Betty! He thought of her with irritated sympathy—she need not have given way to tears on the door-step. She might well feel lost now Gyp was gone, but not so lost as himself! His pale-gloved hand—the one real hand he had, for his right hand had been amputated at the wrist—twisted vexedly at the small, grizzling moustache lifting itself from the corners of his firm lips. On this grey February day he wore no overcoat; faithful to the absolute, almost shamefaced quietness of that wedding, he had not even donned black coat and silk hat, but wore a blue suit and a hard black felt. The instinct of a soldier and hunting man to exhibit no sign whatever of emotion did not desert him this dark day of his life; but his grey-hazel eyes kept contracting, staring fiercely, contracting again; and, at moments, as if overpowered by some deep feeling, they darkened and seemed to draw back in his head. His face was narrow and weathered and thin-cheeked, with a clean-cut jaw, small ears, hair darker than the moustache, but touched at the side wings with grey—the face of a man of action, self-reliant, resourceful. And his bearing was that of one who has always been a bit of a dandy, and paid attention to "form," yet been conscious sometimes that there were things beyond. A man, who, preserving all the precision of a type, yet had in him a streak of something not typical. Such often have tragedy in their pasts.

Making his way towards the park, he turned into Mount Street. There was the house still, though the street had been very different then—the house he had passed, up and down in the fog, like a ghost, that November afternoon, like a cast-out dog, in agony of mind, twenty-three years ago, when Gyp was born. And then to be told at the door—he, with no right to enter, he, loving as he believed man never loved woman—to be told at the door that *she* was dead—dead in bearing what he and she alone knew was their child! Up and down in the fog, hour after hour, knowing her time was upon her; and at last to be told that! Of all fates that befell men, surely the most awful was to love too much.

Queer that his route should take him past the very house to-day, after this new bereavement! Accursed luck—that gout which had sent him to Wiesbaden, last September! Accursed luck that Gyp had ever set eyes on this fellow Fiorsen, with his fatal fiddle! Certainly not since Gyp had come to live with him, fifteen years ago, had he felt so forlorn and fit for nothing. To-morrow he would get back to Mildenham and see what hard riding would do. Without Gyp—to be without Gyp! A fiddler! A chap who had never been on a horse in his life! And with his crutch-handled cane he switched viciously at the air, as though carving a man in two.

His club, near Hyde Park Corner, had never seemed to him so desolate. From sheer force of habit he went into the card-room. The afternoon had so darkened that electric light already burned, and the usual dozen of players were seated among the shaded gleams falling decorously on dark-wood tables, on the backs of chairs, on cards and tumblers, the little gilded coffee-cups, the polished nails of fingers holding cigars. A crony challenged him to piquet. He sat down listless. That three-legged whist—bridge—had always offended his fastidiousness—a mangled short cut of a game! Poker had something blatant in it. Piquet, though out of fashion, remained for him the only game worth playing—the only game which still had style. He held good cards, and rose the winner of five pounds that he would willingly have paid to escape the boredom of the bout. Where would they be by now? Past Newbury; Gyp sitting opposite that Swedish fellow with his greenish wildcat's eyes. Something furtive, and so foreign, about him! A mess—if he were any judge of horse or man! Thank God he had tied Gyp's money up—every farthing! And an emotion that

was almost jealousy swept him at the thought of the fellow's arms round his soft-haired, dark-eyed daughter—that pretty, willowy creature, so like in face and limb to her whom he had loved so desperately.

Eyes followed him when he left the card-room, for he was one who inspired in other men a kind of admiration—none could say exactly why. Many quite as noted for general good sportsmanship attracted no such attention. Was it the streak of something not quite typical—the brand left on him by the past?

Abandoning the club, he walked slowly along the railings of Piccadilly towards home, that house in Bury Street, St. James's, which had been his London abode since he was quite young—one of the few houses in the street left untouched by the passion for pulling down and building up, which had spoiled half London in his opinion.

A silent man, with the soft, quick, dark eyes of a woodcock, and a long, greenish, knitted waistcoat, black cutaway, and tight trousers strapped over his boots, opened the door.

"I shan't go out again, Markey. Mrs. Markey must give me some dinner. Anything will do."

Markey signalled that he had heard, and those eyes under eyebrows meeting and forming one long, dark line, took his master in from head to heel. He had already nodded last night, when his wife had said the guv'nor would take it hard. Retiring to the back premises, he jerked his head towards the street and made a motion upward with his hand, by which Mrs. Markey, an astute woman, understood that she had to go out and shop because the guv'nor was dining in. When she had gone, Markey sat down opposite Betty, Gyp's old nurse. The stout woman was still crying in a quiet way. It gave him the fair hump, for he felt inclined to howl like a dog himself. After watching her broad, rosy, tearful face in silence for some minutes, he shook his head, and, with a gulp and a tremor of her comfortable body, Betty desisted. One paid attention to Markey.

Winton went first into his daughter's bedroom, and gazed at its emptied silken order, its deserted silver mirror, twisting viciously at his little moustache. Then, in his sanctum, he sat down before the fire, without turning up the light. Anyone looking in would have thought he was asleep; but the drowsy influence of that deep chair and cosy fire had drawn him back into the long-ago. What unhappy chance had made him pass *her* house to-day!

In theory there is no such thing as an affinity, no case—of a man, at least—made bankrupt of passion by a single love. In fact, there are such men—neck-or-nothing men, quiet and self-contained, the last to expect that nature will play them such a trick, the last to desire such surrender of themselves, or know when their fate is on them. Who could have seemed less likely than Charles Clare Winton to fall over head and ears in love when he stepped into the Belvoir Hunt ballroom at Grantham one December evening, twenty-four years ago? A keen soldier, a dandy, a first-rate man to hounds, already almost a proverb in his regiment for coolness and for a sort of courteous disregard of women as among the minor things of life—he had stood there by the door, in no hurry to dance, taking a survey with an air that just did not give an impression of "side" because it was not at all put on. And—behold!—*she* had walked past him, and his world was changed for ever. Was it an illusion of light which made her whole spirit seem to shine through a half-startled glance? Or a little trick of gait, a swaying, seductive balance of body; was it the way her hair waved back, or a subtle scent, as of a flower? What was it? The wife of a squire of those parts, with a house in London. There was no excuse—not an ill-treated woman; an ordinary, humdrum marriage, of three years' standing; no children. An amiable, good fellow of a husband, fifteen years older than herself, inclined already to be an invalid. No excuse! Yet, in one month from that night, Winton and she were lovers, not only in thought but in deed. A thing so beyond "good form" and his sense of what was honourable and becoming in an officer and gentleman, that it was never a question of weighing pro and con, the cons had it so completely. And yet from that first evening, he was hers, she his. For each of them the one thought was how to be with the other. If so—why did they not at least go off together? Not for want of his beseeching. And no doubt, if she had survived Gyp's birth, they would have gone. But to face the prospect of ruining two men, as it looked to her, had till then been too much for that soft-hearted creature. Death stilled her struggle before it was decided. She was of those women in whom utter devotion can still go hand in hand with a doubting soul. Such are generally the most fascinating; for the power of hard and prompt decision robs women of mystery, of the subtle atmosphere of change and chance. Though she had but one part in four of foreign blood, she was not at all English.

But Winton was English to his backbone, English in his sense of form, and in that curious streak of desperation which will break form to smithereens in one department and leave it untouched in every other of its owner's life. To have called Winton a "crank" would never have occurred to anyone—his hair was always perfectly parted; his boots glowed; he was hard and reticent, accepting and observing every canon of well-bred existence. Yet, in his one infatuation, he was lost to the world and its opinion. At any moment during that one year of their love he would have risked his life and sacrificed his career for a whole day in her company, yet he never, by word or look, compromised her. He had carried his punctilious observance of her "honour" to a point more bitter than death, consenting, even, to her covering up the tracks of their child's coming. Paying that gambler's debt was by far the bravest deed of his life, and even now its memory festered.

To this very room he had come back after hearing she was dead; this room re-furnished to her taste, so that even now, with its satinwood chairs, little dainty Jacobean bureau, shaded old brass candelabra, divan, it still had an air exotic to bachelordom. There, on the table, had been a letter recalling him to his regiment, ordered on active service. If he had realised what he would go through before he had the chance of trying to lose his life out there, he must have taken that life, sitting in this very chair before the fire. He had not the luck he wished for in that little war—he secured nothing but distinction. When it was over, he went on, with a few more lines in his face and heart, soldiering, shooting tigers, pig-sticking, playing polo, riding to hounds harder than ever; giving nothing away to the world; winning steadily the curious, uneasy admiration felt for those who combine reckless daring with an ice-cool manner. Less of a talker even than most of his kind, and never a talker about women, he did not gain the reputation of a woman-hater, though he so manifestly avoided them. After six years' service in India and Egypt, he lost his right hand in a charge against dervishes, and had to retire, with the rank of major, at the age of thirty-four. For a long time he had hated the very thought of the child—his child, in giving birth to whom the woman he loved had died. Then came a curious change of feeling; and for three years before his return to England, he had been in the habit of sending home odds and ends picked up in the bazaars, to serve as toys. In return, he had received, twice an-

nually at least, a letter from the man who thought himself Gyp's father. These letters he answered. The squire had been fond of *her;* and though never once had it seemed possible to Winton to have acted otherwise than he did, he had all the time preserved a just and formal sense of the wrong he had done this man. He did not experience remorse, but he had always an irksome feeling as of a debt unpaid, mitigated by knowledge that no one had ever suspected, and discounted by memory of the torture he had endured to make sure against suspicion.

When he was at last back in England, the squire had come to see him. The poor man was failing fast from Bright's disease. Winton entered again that house in Mount Street with an emotion, to stifle which required more courage than a cavalry charge. But one whose heart, as he would have put it, is "in the right place," does not indulge the quaverings of his nerves, and he faced those rooms where he had last seen her, faced a lonely little dinner with her husband, without sign of feeling. He did not see little Ghita, or Gyp, as she had nicknamed herself, for she was already in bed; and it was a whole month before he brought himself to go there at an hour when he could see the child if he would. He was afraid. What would the sight of this little creature stir in him? When Betty, the nurse, brought her in to see the soldier gentleman with "the leather hand," who had sent her those funny toys, she stood calmly staring with her large, deep-brown eyes. Being seven, her little brown-velvet frock barely reached the knees of her thin, brown-stockinged legs planted one just in front of the other, as might be the legs of a small brown bird; the oval of her gravely wondering face was a warm cream colour without red in it, except that of the lips, which were neither full nor thin, and had a little tuck, the tiniest possible dimple at one corner. Her hair of warm dark brown had been specially brushed and tied with a narrow red ribbon back from her forehead, which was broad and rather low, and this added to her gravity. Her eyebrows were thin and dark and perfectly arched; her little nose perfectly straight, her little chin in perfect balance between round and point. She stood and stared till Winton smiled. Then the gravity of her face broke, her lips parted, her eyes seemed to fly a little. And Winton's heart turned over within him—she was the very child of her that he had lost! And he said, in a voice which seemed to him to tremble:

"Well, Gyp?"

"Thank you for my toys; I like them."

He held out his hand, and she put her small hand into it. A sense of solace, as if someone had slipped a finger in and smoothed his heart, came over Winton. Gently, so as not to startle her, he raised her hand a little, bent, and kissed it. Either because of his instant recognition that here was one as sensitive as child could be, or of some deeper instinctive sense of ownership between them from that moment, Gyp conceived for him a rushing admiration, one of those headlong affections children will sometimes take for the most unlikely persons.

He used to go there at an hour when he knew the squire would be asleep, between two and five. After he had been with Gyp, walking in the park, riding with her in the Row, or on wet days sitting in her lonely nursery telling stories, while stout Betty looked on half hypnotised, a rather queer and doubting look on her comfortable face—after such hours, he found it difficult to go to the squire's study and sit opposite him, smoking. Those interviews reminded him too much of past days, when he had kept such a desperate check on himself. The squire welcomed him eagerly, saw nothing, felt nothing, was grateful for his goodness to the child. He had died in the following spring. And Winton found that he had been made Gyp's guardian and trustee. Since his wife's death, the squire had muddled his affairs, his estate was heavily mortgaged; but Winton accepted the position with an almost savage satisfaction, and, from that moment, schemed deeply to get Gyp all to himself. The Mount Street house was sold; the Lincolnshire place let. She and Nurse Betty were installed at his own hunting-box, Mildenham. In this effort to get her away from all the squire's relations, he employed to the utmost his power of making people feel him unapproachable. Never impolite, he simple froze them out. Well-off himself, his motives could not be called in question. In one year he had isolated her from all except stout Betty. He had no qualms, for Gyp was no more happy away from him than he from her. He had at last decided that she should be called by his name, round Mildenham. It was to Markey he gave the order that Gyp was to be little Miss Winton for the future. When he came in from hunting that day, Betty was waiting in his study. She stood in the emptiest part of that rather dingy room. Her round, rosy face was confused between awe and resolution, and she had made a sad mess of her white apron. Her blue eyes met Winton's with a sort of desperation.

"About what Markey told me, sir. My old master wouldn't have liked it, sir."

Touched on the raw, Winton said icily:

"Indeed! You will be good enough to comply with my wish, all the same."

The stout woman's face grew very red.

"Yes, sir; but I've seen what I've seen. I never said anything, but I've got eyes. If Miss Gyp's to take your name, sir, then tongues'll wag, and my dear, dead mistress——"

At the look on his face she stopped.

"You will be kind enough to keep your thoughts to yourself. If any word or deed of yours gives the slightest excuse for talk —you go, and you never see Gyp again! In the meantime you will do what I ask. Gyp is my adopted daughter."

She had always been a little afraid of him, but she had never seen that look in his eyes or heard him speak in that voice. And, bending her full moon of a face, she went, with her apron crumpled and tears in her eyes. Winton, at the window, watching the darkness gather, the leaves flying by on a sou'-westerly wind, drank his cup of bitter triumph. He had never had the right to that dead, forever-loved mother of his child. He meant to have the child. If tongues must wag, let them! This was a defeat of all his previous precaution, a deep victory of natural instinct. And his eyes narrowed and stared into the darkness.

II

In spite of victory over all human rivals in the heart of Gyp, Winton had a rival whose strength he fully realised perhaps for the first time now that she was gone, and he, before the fire, was brooding over her departure and the past. Not likely that one of his decisive type, whose life had so long been bound up with swords and horses, would grasp what music might mean to a little girl. She required, he knew, to be taught scales, and "In a Cottage near a Wood" with other melodies. He took care not to go within sound of them, and had no conception of the avidity with which Gyp had mopped up all, and more than all, her governess could teach her. He was blind to the rapture with which she listened to any stray music—to carols in the Christmas dark, to certain hymns, and one special "Nunc Dimittis" in the village church; to the horn of the hunter far out in the quivering, dripping coverts; even to Markey's whistling, which was strangely sweet.

He could share her love of dogs and horses, take an anxious interest in her way of catching bumble-bees in the hollow of her hand and putting them to her small, delicate ear to hear them buzz, sympathise with her continual ravages among the flower-beds, in the old-fashioned garden, full of lilacs and laburnums in spring, pinks, roses, cornflowers in summer, dahlias and sunflowers in autumn, and always a little neglected and overgrown, a little squeezed in, and elbowed by the more important surrounding paddocks. He could sympathise with her attempts to draw his attention to the song of birds; but it was simply not in him to understand how she loved and craved for music. She was a cloudy little creature, up and down in mood—rather like a brown lady spaniel that she had, now gay as a butterfly, now brooding as night. Any touch of harshness she took to heart fearfully. Pride and self-disparagement seemed mixed in her so deeply that none knew of which her cloudy fits were the result. Sensitive, she "fancied" things terribly. What others did to her, and thought nothing of, often seemed to her conclusive evidence that she was not loved by anybody, though she wanted to love everyone—nearly. Then she would feel: "If they don't love me, I don't care. I don't want anything of

anybody!" And, presently, all would blow away just like a cloud, and she would love and be gay, until something fresh, perhaps not at all meant to hurt her, would again hurt her horribly. In reality, the whole household loved and admired her. But she was one of those delicate-treading beings, born with a skin too few, who—and especially in childhood—suffer from themselves in a world born with a skin too many.

To Winton's delight, she knew no fear on horseback. She had the best governess he could get her, the daughter of an admiral, in distressed circumstances; and later on, a tutor for her music, who came twice a week all the way from London—a sardonic man who cherished for her even more secret admiration than she for him. Unlike most girls, she never had an epoch of awkward plainness, but grew like a flower, evenly, steadily. Winton often gazed at her with a sort of intoxication; the turn of her head, the way those perfectly shaped, wonderfully clear brown eyes would "fly," the set of her straight, round neck, the very shaping of her limbs, were all such poignant reminders of what he had so loved. And yet, for all that likeness to her mother, there was a difference, both in form and character. Gyp had, as it were, an extra touch of chiselling in body, more fastidiousness in soul, a little more poise, a little more sheer grace; in mood more variance, in mind more clarity, and, mixed with her sweetness, a distinct spice of scepticism which her mother had lacked.

Though delicate in build, she was not frail, and out hunting would "go" all day, and come in so tired that she would drop on to the tiger skin before the fire, rather than face the stairs. Life at Mildenham was lonely, save for Winton's hunting cronies, and they but few, for his spiritual dandyism did not gladly suffer the average country gentleman, and his frigid courtesy frightened women.

As Betty had foreseen, tongues did wag—those tongues of the countryside, avid of spice in the tedium of dull lives and brains. And, though no breath of gossip came to Winton's ears, no women visited at Mildenham. Save for the friendly casual acquaintanceships of church-yard, hunting-field, and local race-meetings, Gyp grew up knowing hardly any of her own sex. This dearth developed her reserve, kept her backward in sex perception, gave her a faint, unconscious contempt for men—always at the beck and call of her smile, and easily disquieted by a little frown—gave her also a secret yearning for com-

panions of her own gender, who always took a fancy to her, which made the transitory nature of these friendships tantalising.

Her moral and spiritual growth was not the sort of subject to which Winton could pay much attention. It was pre-eminently a matter one did not talk about. Outward forms, such as going to church, should be preserved; manners should be taught her by his own example as much as possible; beyond this, nature must look after things. His view had much real wisdom. She was a quick and voracious reader, bad at remembering what she read; and though she had soon devoured all the books in Winton's meagre library, including Byron, Whyte-Melville, and Humboldt's "Cosmos," they had not left much on her mind. The attempts of her little governess to impart religion were somewhat arid of result, and the interest of the vicar, Gyp, with her instinctive spice of scepticism, soon put into the same category as the interest of all the other males she knew. She felt that he enjoyed calling her "my dear" and patting her shoulder, and that this enjoyment was enough reward for his exertions.

Tucked away in that little old dark manor house, whose stables alone were up to date—three hours from London, and some thirty miles from The Wash, her upbringing lacked modernity. About twice a year Winton took her to town to stay with his unmarried sister Rosamund in Curzon Street. Those weeks increased her natural taste for charming clothes, fortified her teeth, and fostered her passion for music and the theatre. But the two main nourishments of the modern girl—discussion and games—she lacked utterly. Those years of her life from fifteen to nineteen were before the social resurrection of 1906, and the world still crawled like a winter fly on a window-pane. Winton was a Tory, Aunt Rosamund a Tory, everybody round her a Tory. The only spiritual influence on her girlhood was her headlong love for her father. The sense of form both had in high degree prevented much demonstration; but to be with him, do things for him, to admire, and credit him with perfection; and, since she could not exactly wear the same clothes or speak in the same clipped, quiet, decisive voice, to dislike the clothes and voices of other men—all this was precious to her beyond everything. If she inherited his fastidious sense of form, she also inherited his capacity for putting all her eggs in one basket. And since her company alone gave him real happiness, the

current of love flowed over her heart all the time. Abundant love *for* somebody was as necessary to her as water running up the stems of flowers, abundant love *from* somebody as needful as sunshine on their petals. And Winton's somewhat frequent little runs to town, to Newmarket, or where not, were always marked in her by a fall of the barometer, which recovered as his return grew near.

One part of her education, at all events, was not neglected —cultivation of an habitual sympathy with her poorer neighbours. Without concerning himself in the least with problems of sociology, Winton had by nature an open hand and heart for cottagers, and abominated interference with their lives. And so Gyp, who by nature also never set foot anywhere without invitation, was always hearing the words: "Step in, Miss Gyp"; "Step in and sit down, lovey"; and a good many words besides from even the boldest and baddest characters, who liked her pretty face and sympathetic listening.

So passed the eleven years till she was nineteen and Winton forty-six. Then, under the wing of her little governess, she went to the hunt-ball. Her dress, perfect in fit, was not white, but pale maize-colour, as if she had already been to dances. She had all Winton's dandyism, and just so much more as was appropriate to her sex. With her dark hair, fluffed and coiled, waving across her forehead, her neck bare for the first time, her eyes really "flying," and a demeanour perfectly cool—as though she knew that light and movement, covetous looks, soft speeches, and admiration were her birthright—she was more beautiful than even Winton had thought her. At her breast she wore a bunch of cyclamen procured by him from town—a flower of whose scent she was very fond. Swaying and delicate, warmed by excitement, she reminded him, in every movement and by every glance of her eyes, of her whom he had first met at just such a ball as this. And by the carriage of his head he conveyed to the world the pride he was feeling.

That evening held many sensations for Gyp—some delightful, one confused, one unpleasant. Admiration was dear to her. She passionately enjoyed dancing, loved feeling that she was dancing well and giving pleasure. But, twice over, she sent away her partners, smitten with compassion for her little governess sitting against the wall with no one to take notice of her, because she was elderly, and roundabout! And, to that loyal person's horror, she insisted on sitting beside her all through

two dances. Nor would she go in to supper with anyone but Winton. Returning to the ballroom on his arm, she overheard an elderly woman say: "Oh, don't you know? Of course, he really *is* her father!" and an elderly man answer: "Ah, that accounts for it—quite so!" She could see their inquisitive, cold, slightly malicious glances, and knew they were speaking of her. And just then her partner came for her.

"Really *is* her father!" The words meant too much to be grasped this evening of full sensations. They left a little bruise somewhere, but softened and anointed, just a sense of confusion at the back of her mind. And very soon came that other sensation, ugly and disillusioning. It was after a dance with a good-looking man quite twice her age. They were sitting behind some palms, when suddenly he bent his flushed face and kissed her bare arm above the elbow. If he had hit her he could not have astonished or hurt her more. It seemed to her innocence that he would never have done such a thing if she had not said something dreadful to encourage him. She got up, gazed at him a moment with eyes dark from pain, shivered, and slipped away. She went straight to Winton. From her face, all closed up, her tightened lips, and the familiar little droop at their corners, he knew something dire had happened; but she would say nothing except that she was tired and wanted to go home. And so, with the faithful governess, who, having been silent perforce nearly all the evening, was now full of conversation, they drove out into the frosty night. Winton sat beside the chauffeur, smoking viciously, his fur collar turned up over his ears, his eyes stabbing the darkness, under his round, low-drawn fur cap. Who had dared upset his darling? And, within the car, the little governess chattered softly, and Gyp in her dark corner sat silent, seeing nothing but that insult.

She lay awake long hours in the darkness, while coherence was forming in her mind. Those words: "Really *is* her father!" and that man's kissing of her bare arm, were a sort of revelation of sex-mystery, hardening the consciousness that there was something at the back of her life. A child so sensitive had not, of course, quite failed to feel the spiritual draughts around her; but instinctively she had recoiled from more definite perceptions. The time before Winton came was all so faint —Betty, toys, short glimpses of a kind, invalidish man called "Papa." In that word there was no depth compared with the word "Dad" bestowed on Winton. None, except Betty, had

ever talked of her mother. There was nothing sacred in Gyp's associations, no faiths to be broken by any knowledge that might come to her; isolated from other girls, she had little realisation even of the conventions. But she suffered horribly, lying there in the dark—from bewilderment, from thorns dragged over her skin, rather than from a stab in the heart. The knowledge of something about her conspicuous, doubtful, provocative of insult, as she thought, hurt grievously. Those few wakeful hours made a heavy mark. She fell asleep at last, still all in confusion, and woke up with a passionate desire to *know*. All that morning she sat at her piano, playing, refusing to go out, frigid to Betty and her governess, till the former was reduced to tears and the latter to Wordsworth. After tea she went to Winton's study, that dingy little room where he never studied anything, with leather chairs and books which—except "Mr. Jorrocks," Byron, those on the care of horses, and the novels of Whyte-Melville—he never read; with prints of super-equine celebrities, his sword, and photographs of Gyp and of brother officers on the walls; with only two bright spots —the fire, and the little bowl that Gyp always kept filled with flowers.

When she came gliding in, slender and rounded, her creamy, dark-eyed, oval face all cloudy, she seemed to Winton to have grown up of a sudden. He had been cudgelling his brains all day. From the fervour of his love he felt an anxiety that was almost fear. What could have happened last night—the first night of her entrance into meddlesome, gossiping society! She slid down to the floor against his knee. He could not see her face, could not even touch her; for she had settled down on his right side. He mastered his tremors and said:

"Well, Gyp—tired?"

"No."

"A little bit?"

"No."

"Was it up to what you thought, last night?"

"Yes."

The logs hissed and crackled; the long flames ruffled in the chimney-draught; the wind roared outside—then, so suddenly that it took his breath away:

"Dad, are you really and truly my father?"

In the few seconds before an answer that could in no way be evaded, Winton had time for a tumult of reflection. A less

resolute character would have been caught by mental blankness, then flung itself in panic on "Yes" or "No." But Winton would not answer without having faced the consequences of his reply. To be her father was the most warming thing in his life; but if he avowed it, how far would he injure her love for him? What did a girl know? How make her understand? What would her feeling be about her dead mother? How would that dead loved one feel? What would she have wished?

It was a cruel moment. And the girl, pressed against his knee, with face hidden, gave him no help. Impossible to keep it from her, now that her instinct was roused! And, clenching his hand on the arm of his chair, he said:

"Yes, Gyp; your mother and I loved each other."

He felt a quiver go through her, would have given much to see her face. What, even now, did she understand? Well, it must be gone through with, and he said:

"What made you ask?"

She shook her head and murmured:

"I'm glad."

Grief, shock, even surprise, would have roused all his loyalty to the dead, all the old stubborn bitterness, and he would have frozen up against her. But this acquiescent murmur made him long to smooth it down.

"Nobody has ever known. She died when you were born. It was a fearful grief to me. If you've heard anything, it's just gossip, because you go by my name. Your mother was never talked about. But it's best you should know, now you're grown up. People don't often love as she and I loved. You needn't be ashamed."

Her face was still turned from him. She said quietly:

"I'm not ashamed. Am I very like her?"

"Yes; more than I could ever have hoped."

"Then you don't love me for myself?"

Winton was but dimly conscious of how that question revealed her nature, its power of piercing instinctively to the heart of things, its sensitive pride, and demand for utter and exclusive love. And he simply said:

"What do you think?"

Then, to his dismay, he perceived that she was crying—struggling against it so that her shoulder actually shook his knee. He had hardly ever known her cry, not in all the disasters of unstable youth, and she had received her full meed of

knocks and tumbles. He could only stroke that shoulder, and say:

"Don't cry, Gyp; don't cry!"

She ceased as suddenly as she had begun, got up, and, before he too could rise, was gone.

That evening, at dinner, she was just as usual. He could not detect the slightest difference in her voice or manner, or in her good-night kiss. A moment that he had dreaded for years was over, leaving only the faint shame which follows a breach of reticence on the spirits of those who worship it. While the old secret had been quite undisclosed, it had not troubled him. Disclosed, it hurt him. But Gyp, in those twenty-four hours, had left childhood behind for good; her feeling towards men had hardened. If she did not hurt them a little, they would hurt her! The sex-instinct had come to life.

III

The next two years were much less solitary, passed in more or less constant gaiety. His confession had spurred Winton on to the fortification of his daughter's position. He would not have her looked on askance. Whether at Mildenham, or in London under the wing of his sister, there was no difficulty. Gyp was too pretty, Winton too cool, his quietness too formidable. She had every advantage.

The day that she came of age they were up in town, and he summoned her to the room, in which he now sat by the fire recalling all these things, to receive an account of his stewardship. He had nursed her greatly embarrassed inheritance very carefully till it amounted to some twenty thousand pounds. He had never told her of it—the subject was dangerous, and, since his own means were ample, she had not wanted for anything. When he had explained exactly what she owned, shown her how it was invested, and told her that she must now open her own banking account, she stood gazing at the sheets of paper, whose items she had been supposed to understand, and her face gathered the look which meant that she was troubled. Without lifting her eyes she asked:

"Does it all come from—him?"

He had not expected that.

"No; eight thousand of it was your mother's."

Gyp looked at him, and said:

"Then I won't take the rest—please, Dad."

Winton felt a sort of crabbed pleasure. What should be done with that money if she did not take it, he did not know. But not to take it was like her, made her more than ever his daughter—a kind of final victory. He turned away to the window from which he had so often watched for her mother. There was the corner she used to turn! In one minute, surely she would be standing there, colour glowing in her cheeks, her eyes soft behind her veil, her breast heaving a little with her haste, waiting for his embrace. There she would stand, drawing up her veil. He turned round. Difficult to believe it was not she! And he said:

"Very well, my love. But you will take the equivalent from

me instead. The other can be put by; someone will benefit some day!"

At those unaccustomed words, "My love," from his undemonstrative lips, the colour mounted in her cheeks and her eyes shone. She threw her arms round his neck.

She had her fill of music in those days, taking piano lessons from a Monsieur Harmost, a grey-haired native of Liége, with mahogany cheeks and the touch of an angel, who kept her hard at work and called her his "little friend." There was scarcely a concert of merit that she did not attend or a musician of mark whose playing she did not know, and, though fastidiousness saved her from squirming in adoration round the feet of those prodigious performers, she perched them all on pedestals, men and women alike, and now and then met them at her aunt's house in Curzon Street.

Aunt Rosamund, also musical, so far as breeding would allow, stood for a good deal to Gyp, who had built up about her a romantic story of love wrecked by pride. She was a tall, handsome woman, a year older than Winton, with a long, aristocratic face, deep-blue, rather shining eyes, a gentlemanly manner, warm heart, and a not unmelodious drawl. Very fond of Gyp, what passed within her mind as to their real relationship, remained ever discreetly hidden. She was, too, something of a humanitarian, and the girl had just that softness which fascinates women who perhaps might have been happier if they had been born men. A cheery soul, given to long coats and waistcoats, stocks, and a crutch-handled stick, she—like her brother—had "style," but more sense of humour—valuable in musical circles! And at her house, the girl was practically compelled to see fun as well as merit in all those prodigies, haloed with hair and filled to overflowing with music and themselves.

Winton had his first really bad attack of gout when Gyp was twenty-two, and, terrified lest he might not be able to sit a horse in time for the opening meets, he went off with her and Markey to Wiesbaden. They had rooms in the Wilhelmstrasse, overlooking the gardens, where leaves were already turning. The cure was long and obstinate. Attended by the silent Markey, Gyp rode daily on the Neroberg, chafing at regulations which reduced her to specified tracks in that majestic wood; and once or even twice a day she would go to the concerts in the *Kurhaus*, either with her father or alone.

The first time she heard Fiorsen play she was alone. Unlike

most violinists, he was tall and thin, with great pliancy of body and movement. His face was pale, and went strangely with hair and moustache of a dirt-gold colour, and his thin cheeks with very broad high cheekbones, had little narrow scraps of whisker. He seemed rather awful to Gyp—but his playing stirred and swept her in an uncanny way. He had remarkable technique; and the intense wayward feeling of his playing was chiselled by it, as if a flame were being frozen in its swaying. She did not join in the tornado of applause, but sat motionless, looking up at him. He passed the back of his hand across his hot brow, shoving up a wave or two of that queer-coloured hair; then, with a rather disagreeable smile, made a short supple bow. What strange eyes he had—like a great cat's! Surely they were green; fierce, yet almost furtive—mesmeric! The strangest man she had ever seen, and the most frightening. He seemed looking straight at her; and, dropping her gaze, she clapped. When she looked again, his face had a kind of wistfulness. He made another of those little supple bows straight at her, and jerked his violin up to his shoulder. 'He's going to play to me,' she thought absurdly. He played without accompaniment a little tune which seemed to tweak the heart. This time she did not look up, but was conscious that he gave one impatient bow and walked off.

That evening at dinner she said to Winton:

"I heard a violinist to-day, Dad, the most wonderful playing—Gustav Fiorsen. Is that Swedish—or what?"

Winton answered:

"Very likely. What sort to look at? I used to know a Swede in the Turkish army—nice fellow."

"Tall and thin and white-faced, with bumpy cheekbones, and hollows under them, and queer green eyes. Oh, and little goldy side-whiskers."

"By Jove! It sounds the limit."

Gyp murmured, with a smile:

"Yes; I think perhaps he is."

She saw him next day in the gardens. They were sitting close to the Schiller statue, Winton reading *The Times,* to whose advent he looked forward more than he admitted, for he was loth by confessions of boredom to disturb Gyp's enjoyment of her stay. Perusing the account of a Newmarket meeting, he kept stealing sidelong glances at his daughter.

She had never looked prettier, daintier, shown more breeding

than she did out here among all the cosmopolitan hairy-heeled crowd in this God-forsaken place! The girl, unconscious of his stealthy regalement, was letting her clear eyes rest, in turn, on each figure that passed, on the movements of birds and dogs, watching the sunlight glisten on the grass, burnish the copper beeches, the lime-trees, and those tall poplars down there by the water. The doctor at Mildenham, once consulted on a bout of headache, had called her eyes "perfect organs," and certainly no eyes could take things in more swiftly or completely. She was attractive to dogs, and every now and then one would stop, in two minds whether or no to put his nose into this foreign girl's hand. From a flirtation of eyes with a great Dane, she looked up and saw Fiorsen passing, in company with a shorter, square man, having very fashionable trousers and a corseted waist. The violinist's tall, thin, loping figure was tightly buttoned into a brownish-grey frock-coat suit; he wore a rather broad-brimmed, grey, velvety hat: in his buttonhole was a white flower; his cloth-topped boots were of patent leather; his tie bunched out at the ends over a soft white linen shirt—altogether quite a dandy! His most strange eyes suddenly swept down on hers, and he made a movement as if to put his hand to his hat.

'Why, he remembers me,' she thought. That thin-waisted figure with head set just a little forward between rather high shoulders, and its long stride, curiously suggested a leopard or some lithe creature. He touched his short companion's arm, and muttered something, turned round, and came back. She could see him staring her way, and knew he was coming simply to look at her. She knew, too, that her father was watching. And she felt that those greenish eyes would waver before his stare—that stare of the Englishman of a certain class, which never condescends to be inquisitive. They passed; Gyp saw Fiorsen turn to his companion, slightly tossing back his head in their direction, and heard the companion laugh. A little flame shot up in her.

Winton said:

"Rum-looking Johnnies one sees here!"

"That was the violinist I told you of—Fiorsen."

"Oh! Ah!" But he had evidently forgotten.

That Fiorsen should have remembered her out of all that audience subtly flattered her vanity. She lost her ruffled feeling. Though her father thought his dress awful, it was really rather becoming. He would not have looked as well in proper

English clothes. Once, at least, during the next two days, she noticed the short, square young man who had been walking with him, and was conscious that he followed her with his eyes.

And then a certain Baroness von Maisen, a cosmopolitan friend of Aunt Rosamund's, German by marriage, half-Dutch, half-French, by birth, asked her if she had heard the Swedish violinist, Fiorsen. He would be the best violinist of the day, if—and she shook her head. Finding that expressive shake unquestioned, the baroness pursued her thoughts:

"Ah, these musicians! He wants saving from himself. If he does not halt soon, he will be lost. Pity! A great talent!"

Gyp looked at her steadily and asked:

"Does he drink, then?"

"*Pas mal!* But there are things besides drink, *ma chère.*"

Instinct and so much life with Winton made the girl regard it as beneath her to be shocked. She did not seek knowledge of life, but refused to shy away from it; and the baroness, to whom innocence was piquant, went on:

"Women, always women! A great pity! It will spoil his spirit. His sole chance is to find one woman, but I pity her; *sapristi,* what a life for her!"

Gyp said calmly:

"Would a man like that ever love?"

The baroness goggled her eyes.

"I have known such a man become a slave. I have known him running after a woman like a lamb while she was deceiving him here and there. *On ne peut jamais dire. Ma belle, il y a des choses que vous ne savez pas encore.*" She took Gyp's hand. "And yet, one thing is certain. With those eyes, *you* have a time before you!"

Gyp withdrew her hand and shook her head; she did not believe in love.

"Ah, but you will turn some heads! No fear! as you English say. There is a fatality in those pretty brown eyes!"

A girl may be pardoned who takes as a compliment the saying that her eyes are fatal. The words warmed Gyp, uncontrollably light-hearted in these days, just as she was warmed when people turned to stare at her. The soft air, the mellowness of this gay place, much music, a sense of being rare among people who, by their heavier type, enhanced her own, had produced in her a kind of intoxication, making her what the baroness called "*un peu folle.*" She was always breaking into laughter. Every-

thing to her just then was either "funny" or "lovely." And the baronness, conscious of the girl's *chic*, genuinely attracted by one so pretty, took care that she saw all the people, perhaps more than all, who were desirable.

Curiosity is a vivid emotion. The more a man has conquered, the more precious field he is for a woman's conquest. To attract one who has attracted many, what was it but a proof that one's charm was superior to that of all those others? The words of the baroness deepened in Gyp the impression that Fiorsen was "impossible," but secretly fortified the faint excitement she felt that he should have remembered her out of all that audience. Later on, they bore more fruit than that. But first came that queer incident of the flowers.

Coming in from a ride, a week after she had sat with Winton under the Schiller statue, she found on her dressing-table a bunch of Gloire de Dijon and La France roses. There was no card. All that the German maid could say was that a boy had brought them from a flower shop "for Fräulein Vinton"; Gyp surmised that they came from the baroness. In her bodice at dinner, and to the concert after, she wore one La France and one Gloire de Dijon—a daring mixture of pink and orange against her oyster-coloured frock. They had bought no programme, all music being the same to Winton, and Gyp not needing any.

When Fiorsen came forward, her cheeks began to colour from sheer anticipation. He played first a minuet by Mozart; then the César Franck sonata; and, coming back to make his bow, held in his hand a Gloire de Dijon and a La France rose. Involuntarily Gyp raised her hand to her own roses. His eyes met hers; he bowed just a little lower. He put the roses to his lips in walking off the platform, and Gyp dropped her hand, as if it had been stung. Should she take out those roses and let them fall? Her father might see, might notice Fiorsen's—put two and two together! He would consider she had been insulted. Had she? She could not bring herself to think so. It was a compliment, as if he wished to tell her that he was playing to her alone. The baroness's words flashed through her mind: "He wants saving from himself. Pity! A great talent!" It *was* a great talent. There must be something worth saving in one who could play like that! They left after his last solo. Gyp put the two roses carefully back among the others.

Three days later, she went to an afternoon "at-home" at the

Baroness von Maisen's. She saw him at once, over by the piano, with his short, square companion, listening to a voluble lady, and looking bored and restless. All that overcast afternoon, still and with queer lights in the sky, as if rain were coming, she had been feeling out of mood, a little homesick. Now she felt excited. She saw the short companion go up to the baroness; a minute later, he was brought to her and introduced —Count Rosek. Gyp did not like his face; there were dark rings under the eyes, and he was too perfectly self-possessed, with a kind of cold sweetness; but he was agreeable and polite, and spoke English well. He was—it seemed—a Pole, who lived in London, and knew all that was to be known about music. Miss Winton—he believed—had heard his friend Fiorsen play; but not in London? No? That was odd; he had been there some months last season. Faintly annoyed at her ignorance, Gyp answered:

"Yes; but I was in the country nearly all last summer."

"He had a great success. I shall take him back; it is best for his future. What do you think of his playing?"

In spite of herself, for she did not like expanding to this sphinxlike little man, Gyp murmured:

"Oh, simply wonderful, of course!"

He nodded, and then rather suddenly said, with a peculiar little smile:

"May I introduce him? Gustav—Miss Winton!"

Gyp turned. He was just behind her, bowing; and his eyes had a look of humble adoration which he made no attempt whatever to conceal. Gyp saw another smile slide over the Pole's lips; and she was alone in the bay window with Fiorsen. Close to, he had not so much that look of an animal behind bars, and he certainly was in his way a dandy, beautifully groomed, and having some pleasant essence on his handkerchief or hair, of which she would have disapproved if he had been English. He wore a diamond ring also, which did not somehow seem bad form on that particular little finger. His height, broad cheekbones, thick but not long hair, the hungry vitality of his face, figure, movements, annulled those evidences of femininity. He was male enough, rather too male. Speaking with a queer, crisp accent, he said: "Miss Winton, you are my audience here, I play to you—only to you."

Gyp laughed.

"You laugh at me; but you need not. I play for you because

I admire you. I admire you terribly. If I sent you those flowers, it was not to be rude. It was my gratitude for the pleasure of your face." His voice actually trembled. And, looking down, Gyp answered:

"It was very kind of you. I want to thank you, too, for your playing. It is beautiful—really beautiful!"

He made her another little bow.

"When I go back to London, will you come and hear me?"

"I should think anyone would go to hear you, if they had the chance."

He gave a short laugh.

"I am here for money; I hate this place. It bores me! Was that your father sitting with you under the statue?"

Gyp nodded. She had not forgotten the slighting turn of his head.

He passed his hand over his face, as if to wipe off its expression.

"He is very English. But you—of no country—and of all!"

Gyp made him an ironical little bow.

"No; I should not know your country—you are neither of the North nor of the South. I came here hoping to meet you; I am extremely happy. Miss Winton, I am your very devoted servant."

He was speaking very fast, very low, with an agitated earnestness surely not put on. Then suddenly muttering: "These people!" he made her another of his little bows and abruptly slipped away. The baroness was bringing up another man. The thought left by that meeting was: 'Is that how he begins to everyone?' She could not quite believe it. The stammering earnestness of his voice, those humbly adoring looks!

Too sensitive to confide in anyone, she had no chance to ventilate the curious sensations of attraction and repulsion fermenting in her, feelings defying analysis, mingling and quarrelling deep down in her heart. It was certainly not love, not even the beginning of that; but it was the kind of dangerous interest children feel in things mysterious, out of reach, yet within reach, if only they dared! And the tug of music was there, and the tug of those words of the baroness about salvation—the thought of achieving the impossible, reserved only for——! But all these thoughts and feelings were as yet in embryo. She might never see him again! She did not even know whether she wanted to.

IV

Gyp was in the habit of walking with her father to the Kochbrunnen, where, with other patient folk, he was required to drink slowly for twenty minutes every morning. While he was thus imbibing she would sit in a remote corner of the garden, and read a novel in the *Reclam* edition, by way of a German lesson.

She was sitting there, the morning after the "at-home" at the Baroness von Maisen's, reading Turgenev's "Torrents of Spring," when she saw Count Rosek sauntering down the path with a glass of the waters in his hand. Memory of the smile with which he had introduced Fiorsen sent her to cover beneath her sunshade. She could see his patent-leathered feet, and well-turned, peg-top-trousered legs go by with the gait of a man whose waist is corseted. The conviction that he wore those prerogatives of womanhood increased her dislike. How dare men be so effeminate? Yet someone had told her that he was a good rider, a good fencer, and very strong. When he was past, for fear he might turn and come back, she closed her little book and slipped away. But her figure and her springing step were more unmistakable than she knew.

Next morning, on the same bench, she was reading breathlessly the scene between Gemma and Sanin at the window, when she heard Fiorsen's voice, behind her, say:

"Miss Winton!"

He, too, held a glass of the waters in one hand, and his hat in the other.

"I have just made your father's acquaintance. May I sit down a minute?"

Gyp drew to one side of the bench, and he sat down.

"What are you reading?"

"A story called 'Torrents of Spring.'"

"Ah, the finest ever written! Where are you?"

"Gemma and Sanin in the thunderstorm."

"Wait! You have Madame Polozov to come! What a creation! How old are you, Miss Winton?"

"Twenty-two."

"You would be too young to appreciate that story if you were

not *you*. But you know much—by instinct. What is your Christian name—forgive me!"

"Ghita."

"Ghita? Not soft enough."

"I am always called Gyp."

"Gyp—ah, Gyp! Yes; Gyp!"

He repeated her name so impersonally that she could not be angry.

"I told your father I have had the pleasure of meeting you. He was very polite."

Gyp said coldly:

"My father is always polite."

"Like the ice in which they put champagne. I suppose they have told you that I am a *mauvais sujet*." Gyp inclined her head. He looked at her steadily, and said: "It is true. But I could be better—much."

She wanted to look at him, but could not, seized by a queer sort of exultation. This man had power; yet she had power over him. If she wished she could make him her slave, her dog, chain him to her. She had but to hold out her hand, and he would go on his knees to kiss it. She had but to say, "Come," and he would come from wherever he might be. She had but to say "Be good," and he would be good. It was her first experience of power; and it was intoxicating. But Gyp could never be self-confident for long; over her most victorious moments brooded the shadow of distrust; and as if he read her thought, Fiorsen said:

"Tell me to do something—anything; I will do it, Miss Winton."

"Then—go back to London at once. You are wasting yourself here, you know."

"You have asked me the one thing I can't do, Miss—Miss Gyp!"

"Please—not that; it's like a servant!"

"I *am* your servant!"

"Is that why you won't do what I ask you?"

"You are cruel."

Gyp laughed.

He said, with sudden fierceness:

"I am not going away from you; do not think it." Bending with the utmost swiftness, he took her hand, put his lips to it, and turned on his heel.

Gyp, uneasy and astonished, stared at her hand, still tingling from the pressure of his bristly moustache. Then she laughed again—it was just "foreign" to have your hand kissed—and went back to her book, but without taking in too many of its words.

Was ever courtship more strange than that which followed? Gyp never lost the sense of having the whip-hand, always felt like one giving alms, or extending favour, yet had a feeling of being unable to get away. The very strength of the spell she seemed to lay on him reacted on herself. Thoroughly sceptical at first, she could not remain so. He was too morose and unhappy if she did not smile on him, too alive and excited and grateful if she did. The change in his eyes from their ordinary restless, fierce, and furtive expression to humble adoration or wistful hunger when they looked at her, could never have been simulated. And she had no lack of chance to see that metamorphosis. Wherever she went, there he was. If to a concert, he would be a few paces from the door, waiting for her entrance. If to a confectioner's for tea, as likely as not he would come in. Every afternoon he walked where she must pass, riding to the Neroberg.

Except in the gardens of the Kochbrunnen, when he would come up humbly and ask to sit with her for five minutes, he never forced his company, or tried in any way to compromise her. He must have had an instinct that it was dangerous with one so sensitive. There were other moths, too, round the candle, and they served to keep his attentions from being too conspicuous. Did she comprehend what was going on, understand how her defences were being sapped, grasp the danger to retreat that lay in permitting him to hover? Not really. It all served to swell the triumphant intoxication of days when she was ever more and more in love with living, more and more conscious of being appreciated and admired, and of having power to do what others could not.

He excited her. Whatever else one might be in his moody, vivid company, one would not be dull. One morning, he told her something of his life. His father had been a small Swedish landowner, a very strong man and a very hard drinker; his mother, the daughter of a painter. She had taught him the violin, but died while he was still a boy. When he was seventeen he had quarrelled with his father, and had to play his violin

for a living in the streets of Stockholm. A well-known violinist, hearing him one day, had taken him in hand. Then his father had drunk himself to death, and he had inherited the little estate. He had sold it at once—"for follies," as he put it crudely. "Ah! Miss Winton; I have committed many follies, but they are nothing to those I shall commit the day I do not see you any more!" And, with that disturbing remark, he got up and left her. She had smiled at his words, from scepticism, compassion and some feeling she did not understand at all. In those days, she understood herself but little.

How far did Winton understand, how far see what was going on? In truth he had taken alarm. But he was afraid of showing disquiet by any dramatic change, or he would have carried her off a fortnight at least before his cure was over. He knew too well the signs of passion. That long, loping, wolfish fiddling fellow with the broad cheekbones and little side-whiskers (Good God!) and greenish eyes whose looks at Gyp he secretly marked, roused his complete distrust. Perhaps his inbred English contempt for foreigners and artists kept him from direct action. He *could* not take it quite seriously. Gyp, his fastidious perfect Gyp, succumbing, even a little, to a fellow like that! Never! Besides, she would surely consult him in any doubt or difficulty. He forgot the sensitive secrecy of girls, forgot that his love for her had ever shunned words, her love for him never indulged in confidences. Besides he only saw a little of what there was to see, and that little was doctored by Fiorsen for his eyes, shrewd though they were. Nor was there in all so very much, except one episode the day before they left, of which he knew nothing.

That last afternoon was very still, a little mournful. It had rained the night before, and the soaked tree-trunks, the soaked fallen leaves, gave off a faint liquorice-like perfume. Gyp felt as if her spirit had been suddenly emptied of excitement and delight. And after lunch, when Winton was settling his accounts, she wandered out through the long park stretching up the valley. The sky was brooding-grey, the trees still and melancholy. All was a little melancholy, and she went on and on, across the stream, round into a muddy lane through the outskirts of a village, on to higher ground whence she could return by the main road. Why must things come to an end? For the first time in her life she thought of Mildenham and hunting without enthusiasm. She would rather stay in London.

There she would not be cut off from music, from dancing, from people, and all the exhilaration of being appreciated. On the air came the shrilly, hollow droning of a thresher, and the sound seemed exactly to express her feelings. A pigeon flew over, white against the leaden sky; some birch-trees, already golden, shivered and let fall a shower of drops. It was lonely! And, suddenly, two little boys bolted out of the hedge, nearly upsetting her, and scurried down the road. Gyp, putting up her face to see, felt on it soft pin-points of rain. Her frock would be spoiled, one she was fond of—dove-coloured, velvety, not meant for weather. She turned for refuge to the birch-trees. It would be over directly, perhaps. Muffled in distance, the whining drone of that thresher still came travelling, deepening her discomfort. Then in the hedge, whence the boys had bolted down, a man reared himself above the lane, and came striding along toward her. He jumped down the bank, among the birch-trees—Fiorsen—panting, dishevelled, pale with heat. He must have followed her, and climbed straight up from the path she had come along in the bottom, before crossing the stream. His artistic dandyism had been harshly treated by that scramble. He said, breathlessly:

"So you are going to-morrow, and never told me! You thought you would slip away—not a word for me! Are you always so cruel? Well, I will not spare you, either!"

Crouching suddenly, he took hold of her broad ribbon sash, and buried his face in it. Gyp stood trembling. He circled her knees with his arms.

"Oh, Gyp, I love you—I love you—don't send me away—let me be with you! I am your dog—your slave. Oh, Gyp, I love you!"

His voice moved and terrified her. Men had said "I love you" several times during those last two years, but never with that lost-soul ring of passion, never with that look in the eyes, hungry and supplicating, never with that restless, eager, timid touch of hands. She could only murmur:

"Please get up!"

But he went on:

"Love me a little, only a little—love me! Oh, Gyp!"

The thought flashed through Gyp: 'To how many has he knelt, I wonder?' His face had a kind of beauty in its abandonment—the beauty which comes from yearning—and she lost her frightened feeling. He went on, with his stammering

murmur: "I am a prodigal, I know; but if you love me, I will no longer be. I will do great things for you. Oh, Gyp, if you will some day marry me! Not now. When I have proved. Gyp—so sweet—so wonderful!"

His arms crept up till he had buried his face against her waist. Without quite knowing what she did, Gyp touched his hair, and said again:

"Now, please get up."

He got up and whispered:

"Have mercy! Speak to me!"

But she could only look into his face with her troubled, dark eyes. And suddenly she was seized and crushed to him. She shrank away, pushing him back with all her strength. He hung his head, abashed, with eyes shut, lips trembling. Her heart felt again that quiver of compassion, and she murmured:

"I don't know. I will tell you later—later—in England."

He bowed, folding his arms, as if to make her feel safe from him. And when, regardless of the rain, she began to move on, he walked beside her, a yard or so away, humbly, as though he had never hurt her lips with the violence of his kiss.

Back in her room, taking off her wet dress, Gyp tried to remember what he had said and what she had answered. She had not promised anything. But she had given him her address, both in London and the country. Unless she resolutely thought of other things, she still felt the restless touch of his hands, the grip of his arms, and saw his eyes as they were when he was kissing her; and once more she felt frightened and excited.

He was playing at the concert that evening—her last concert. And surely he had never played like that—with a despairing beauty, a sort of frenzied rapture. Listening, there came to her a feeling—a feeling of fatality—that, whether she would or no, she could not free herself from him.

V

Back in England, Gyp lost that feeling, or very nearly. Fiorsen would soon see someone else who seemed all he had said she was! Ridiculous to suppose that he would stop his follies for her, that she had any real power over him! But, deep down, she did not quite believe this.

Winton, who breathed again, hurried her off to Mildenham. He had bought her a new horse. They were in time for the last of the cubbing. And, for a week at least, the passion for riding and the sight of hounds carried all before it. Then, just as the real business of the season was beginning, she began to feel dull and restless. Mildenham was dark; the autumn winds made dreary noises. Her little brown spaniel, very old, died. She accused herself for having left it so long when it was failing. Thinking of all the days Lass had been watching for her to come home—as Betty, with that love of woeful recital dear to simple hearts, took good care to make quite plain—she felt as if she had been cruel. For events such as these, Gyp was both too tender-hearted, and too hard on herself. She was quite ill for several days, and the moment she was better, Winton, in dismay, whisked her back to Aunt Rosamund, in town. He would lose her company, but if it did her good, took her out of herself, he would be content. Running up for the week-end, three days later, he was relieved to find her decidedly perked-up, and left her again with the easier heart.

On the day after her father went back to Mildenham, Gyp received a letter from Fiorsen, forwarded from Bury Street. He was—it said—just returning to London; he had not forgotten any look she had ever given him, or any word she had spoken. He should not rest till he could see her again. "For a long time," the letter ended, "before I first saw you, I was like the dead—lost. I kiss your hands, and am your faithful slave—Gustav Fiorsen." These words, which from any other man would have excited her derision, renewed in Gyp that fluttered feeling, the pleasurable, frightened sense of not being able to get away from his pursuit.

She wrote, in answer, that her aunt would be glad to see him if he cared to come in any afternoon between five and six, and

signed herself "Ghita Winton." She was long over that little note, whose curt formality gave her satisfaction. Was she really mistress of herself—and him; able to dispose as she wished? Surely the note showed it.

It was never easy to tell Gyp's feelings from her face; even Winton was often baffled. Her preparation of Aunt Rosamund for the reception of Fiorsen was cleverly casual. And when he came, he seemed alive to the need for caution, only gazing at Gyp when he could not be seen doing so. But, going out, he whispered: "Not like this—not like this; I must see you alone —I must!" She smiled and shook her head. But bubbles had come back to the wine in her glass.

That evening she said quietly to Aunt Rosamund:

"Dad doesn't like Mr. Fiorsen—can't appreciate his playing, of course."

This discreet remark caused Aunt Rosamund, avid—in a well-bred way—of music, to omit mention of the intruder when writing to her brother. The next two weeks he came almost every day, bringing his violin. Gyp played his accompaniments, and though his hungry stare made her feel hot, she would have missed it.

But when Winton next came up to Bury Street, she was in a quandary. To confess that Fiorsen was here, having omitted to speak of him in her letters? Not to confess, and leave him to find it out from Aunt Rosamund? Seized with panic, she did neither, but told her father she was dying for a gallop. Hailing that as the best of signs, he took her forthwith back to Mildenham. Her feelings were curious—light-hearted, yet compunctious, as of one who escapes yet knows she will soon be seeking to return. The meet was rather far next day, but she insisted on riding to it, while old Pettance, the superannuated jockey, employed as extra stable help at Mildenham, was to bring on her second horse. There was a good scenting-wind, with rain in the offing, and outside the covert Winton and she had a corner to themselves. They had slipped there, luckily unseen, for the astute were given to following the one-handed horseman in faded pink, who, on his bang-tailed black mare, had a knack of getting so well away. One of the whips, a little dark fellow with smouldery eyes and sucked-in weathered cheeks, dashed out of covert, rode past, saluting, and dashed in again. A jay came out with a screech, dived, and doubled back; a hare made off across the fallow—its light-brown loping body barely

visible against the brownish soil. Pigeons, very high up, flew over and away to the next wood. The shrilling voices of the whips rose from the covert-depths, and just a whimper now and then from the hounds, swiftly wheeling their noses among the fern and briers.

Gyp, crisping her fingers on the reins, drew in deep breaths. It smelled sweet and soft and fresh under that sky of blue and light-grey swift-moving clouds—not half the wind down here that there was up there, just enough to be carrying off the beech and oak leaves, loosened by frost two days before. If only a fox would break this side, and they could have the first fields to themselves, alone with hounds! One of these came trotting out, a pretty young creature, busy and unconcerned, raising its tan-and-white head, its mild reproachful deep-brown eyes, at Winton's "Loo-in, Trix!" A burst of music from the covert, and the hound doubled back among the briers.

Gyp's new brown horse was pricking its ears. A young man in a grey cutaway, buff cords, and jack-boots, on a low chestnut mare, came slipping round the covert. Did that mean they were all coming? Impatiently she glanced at this intruder, who raised his hat a little and smiled. The smile, faintly impudent, was infectious, and Gyp was melted to a slight response. Who was he? He looked serene and happy. She did not remember his face at all, yet there was something familiar about it—a broad face, very well cut, and clean-shaved, with dark curly hair, extraordinarily clear eyes, a bold, cool, merry look. Where had she seen somebody like him?

A tiny sound from Winton made her turn her head. A fox was stealing out beyond those further bushes! She fixed her eyes on her father's face. It was hard as steel. Not a sound, not a quiver, as if horse and man had turned to metal. Was he never going to give the view-halloo? Then his lips writhed, and out it came. Gyp cast a swift smile of gratitude at the young man for having had the taste and sense to leave that to her father, and again he smiled at her. There came the first hounds streaming out—one after the other—music and feather! Why didn't Dad go?

Then the black mare slid past her, and, with a bound, her horse followed. The young man on the chestnut was away on the left. Only the huntsman and one whip—besides their three selves! The brown horse went too fast at the first fence and Winton called back: "Steady, Gyp! Steady him!" But she

couldn't; and it didn't matter. Grass, three fields of grass! A lovely fox—going so straight! And each time the brown horse rose, she thought: 'Perfect! Oh, I am happy!' There was no feeling in the world like this, with a leader like Dad, hounds moving free, good going, and the field distanced. Better than dancing; better—yes, better than listening to music. If one could spend one's life galloping, sailing over fences! The new horse was a darling, though he *did* pull.

She crossed the next fence level with the young man, whose low chestnut had a very stealthy action. His hat was crammed down now, and his face close set, but his lips still had something of that smile. Gyp thought: 'He's got a good seat—very strong, only he looks like "thrusting." Nobody rides like Dad—so beautifully quiet!' Indeed, Winton's seat was perfection. The hounds swung round in a curve. Now she was with them, really with them! What a pace! No fox could stand this long!

And suddenly she caught sight of him, barely a field ahead, scurrying desperately, brush down; and the thought flashed through her: 'Oh! don't let's catch you. Go on, fox; go on! Get away!' Were they really all after that little hunted red thing—a hundred great creatures, horses and men and women and dogs, after one little fox! But then came another fence, and quickly another, and she lost all feeling of shame and pity in the exultation of flying over them. A minute later the fox went to earth within a hundred yards of the leading hound, and she was glad. She had been in at deaths before—horrid! But it had been a lovely gallop. And, breathless, smiling rapturously, she wondered whether she could mop her face before the field came up, without that young man noticing.

She could see him talking to her father, and when she rode up, he raised his hat, and looking full at her said: "How you went!" His voice was rather high-pitched and pleasant and lazy. Gyp made him a little bow: "My new horse, you mean." And she kept thinking: 'Where *have* I seen someone like him?'

They had two more runs, but nothing like that first gallop. Nor did she again see the young man, whose name—it seemed—was Summerhay, son of a certain Lady Summerhay at Widrington, ten miles from Mildenham.

Silently jogging home with Winton in fading daylight, she felt very happy—saturated with air and elation. The trees and fields, the haystacks, gates, and ponds beside the lanes, grew

dim; lights came up in the cottage windows; the air smelled sweet of wood smoke. And, for the first time all day, she thought of Fiorsen, thought of him almost longingly. If he could be there in the cosy old drawing-room, to play to her while she lay back—drowsing, dreaming by the fire in the scent of burning cedar logs—the Mozart minuet, or that little heart-catching tune of Poise, played the first time she heard him, or a dozen other of the things he played unaccompanied! That would be the most lovely ending to this lovely day. Just the glow and warmth wanting, to make all perfect—the glow and warmth of music and adoration!

And touching the mare with her heel, she sighed. To indulge fancies about music and Fiorsen was safe here, far away from him; she even thought she would not mind if he were to behave again as he had under the birch-trees in the rain at Wiesbaden. It was so good to be adored. Her old mare, ridden now six years, began the series of contented snuffles that signified home. Here was the last turn, and the loom of the short beech-tree avenue to the house—the old manor-house, comfortable, roomy, rather dark, with wide shallow stairs. She was tired; and it was drizzling now. She would be stiff to-morrow. In the light coming from the open door she saw Markey standing; and, while fishing from her pocket some lumps of sugar, heard him say: "Mr. Fiorsen, sir—gentleman from Wiesbaden—to see you."

Her heart thumped. What did this mean? Why had he come? How had he dared? How could he have been so treacherous to her? Ah, but he was ignorant, of course, that she had not told her father. Judgment was on her! She ran straight in and up the stairs. The voice of Betty, "Your bath's ready, Miss Gyp," roused her. And crying, "Oh, Betty, darling, bring me up my tea!" she ran into the bathroom. She was safe there; and in the delicious heat of her bath could face the situation better.

There could be only one meaning. He had come to ask for her. And, suddenly, she took comfort. Better so; there would be no more secrecy from Dad! And he would stand between her and Fiorsen if—if she decided not to marry him. The thought staggered her. Had she, without knowing it, got so far as this? Yes, and further. Fiorsen would never accept refusal, even if she gave it! But, did she want to refuse?

She loved hot baths, but had never stayed in one so long.

Life was so easy there, and so difficult outside. Betty's knock forced her to get out at last, and let her in with tea and the message: Would Miss Gyp please to go down when she was ready?

VI

With a glance at Gyp's vanishing figure, Winton had said curtly to Markey, "Where have you put this gentleman?" The use of the word "this" was the only trace he showed of his emotions. But on the little journey across the hall he entertained many extravagant thoughts. In the study, he inclined his head courteously enough, waiting for Fiorsen to speak. The "fiddler," still in his fur-lined coat, was twisting a squash hat in his hands. Why couldn't he look you in the face; or, if he did, why did he seem about to eat you?

"You knew I was returned to London, Major Winton?"

So Gyp had been seeing the fellow without letting him know! The thought was chill and bitter to Winton. He must not give her away, however, and he simply bowed. He felt that his visitor was afraid of his frigid courtesy; and he did not mean to help him over that fear.

Fiorsen, who had begun to pace the room, stopped, and said with agitation:

"Major Winton, your daughter is the most beautiful thing on earth. I love her desperately. I am a man with a future. I have what future I like in my art if only I can marry her. I have a little money, too; but in my violin there is all the fortune she can want."

Winton's face expressed nothing but cold contempt. That this fellow should take him for one who would consider money in connection with his daughter, simply affronted him.

Fiorsen went on:

"You do not like me. I saw it the first moment. You are an English gentleman"—he pronounced the words with irony—"I am nothing to you. Yet, in *my* world, I am something. I am not an adventurer. Will you permit me to beg your daughter to be my wife?" He raised his hands which held the hat till they assumed the attitude of prayer.

For a second, Winton realised that the man was suffering. But he said frigidly:

"I am obliged to you, sir, for coming to me first. I don't want to be discourteous in my own house, but I should be glad

if you would be good enough to withdraw and take it that I shall certainly oppose your wish as best I can."

The almost childish disappointment and trouble in Fiorsen's face changed quickly to an expression fierce, furtive, mocking; and then shifted to despair.

"Major Winton, you have loved; you must have loved her mother. I suffer!"

Winton, who had turned to the fire, faced round again.

"I don't control my daughter's affections, sir; she will do as she wishes. I merely say it will be against my hopes and judgment if she marries you. I imagine you've not altogether waited for my leave. I was not blind to the way you hung about her at Wiesbaden, Mr. Fiorsen."

Fiorsen answered with a miserable smile:

"Poor wretches do what they can. May I see her? Let me just see her."

She had been seeing the fellow already without his knowledge, keeping from him—*him*—all her feelings, whatever they were. And he said:

"I'll send for her. In the meantime, perhaps you'll have some tea or whiskey?"

Fiorsen shook her head, and there followed half an hour of the most acute discomfort. Winton, in his mud-stained clothes before the fire, supported it better than his visitor. That child of nature, after endeavouring to emulate his host's quietude, renounced such efforts with an expressive gesture, tramped the room, went to the window, drew aside the curtains and stared out into the dark; came back as if resolved again to confront Winton; then, baffled by that figure so motionless before the fire, flung himself down in an armchair, and turned his face to the wall. Winton was not cruel by nature, but he enjoyed the writhings of this fellow who was endangering Gyp's happiness. Endangering? Surely she would not accept him! Yet, if not, why had she not told him? And he, too, suffered.

Then she came. Her smiling face had in it a kind of warning closeness. She went up to Fiorsen, and holding out her hand, said calmly:

"How nice of you to come!"

Winton had the bitter feeling that he—he—was the outsider. Well, he would speak plainly; there had been too much underhand doing.

"Mr. Fiorsen has done us the honour to wish to marry you.

I've told him that you decide such things for yourself. If you accept him, it will be against my wish, naturally."

While he was speaking the glow deepened in her cheeks; she looked neither at him nor at Fiorsen. Winton noted the rise and fall of the lace on her breast. She gave the tiniest shrug of her shoulders. And, suddenly smitten to the heart, he walked stiffly to the door. It was evident that she had no use for his guidance. If her love for him was not worth to her more than this fellow! But he knew he could not afford wounded feelings; could not get on without her. Married to the greatest rascal on earth, he would still be standing by her, wanting her companionship and love. She represented too much in the present and—the past. With sore heart, indeed, he went to his room.

Fiorsen was gone when he came down to dinner. What the fellow had said, or she had answered, he would not for the world have asked. Gulfs between the proud are not lightly bridged. And, when she came up to say good-night, both their faces were as though coated with wax.

In the days that followed she gave no sign, uttered no word in any way suggesting that she meant to go against his wishes. Fiorsen might not have existed, for any mention made of him. But Winton knew well that she was moping, and cherishing some feeling against himself. One evening, after dinner, he said quietly:

"Tell me frankly, Gyp; do you care for that chap?"

She answered as quietly:

"In a way—yes."

"Is that enough?"

"I don't know, Dad."

Her lips had quivered; and Winton's heart softened, as it always did when he saw her moved. He put his hand out, covered one of hers, and said:

"I shall never stand in the way of your happiness, Gyp. But it must *be* happiness. Can it possibly be that? I don't think so. You know what they said of him out there?"

"Yes."

He had not thought she knew. And his heart sank.

"That's pretty bad, you know. And he's not of our world at all?"

Gyp looked up.

"Do you think *I* belong to 'our world,' Dad?"

Winton turned away. She followed, slipping her hand under his arm.

"I didn't mean to hurt. But it's true, isn't it? I don't belong among society people. Ever since you told me I've felt I don't belong to them. I'm nearer him. Music means more to me than anything!"

Winton gave her hand a convulsive grip.

"If your happiness went wrong, Gyp, I should be most awfully cut up."

"But why shouldn't I be happy, Dad?"

"If you were, I could put up with anyone. But I can't believe you would be. I beg you, my dear—for God's sake, make sure. I'll put a bullet into the man who treats you badly."

At bedtime he said:

"We'll go up to town to-morrow."

Whether from a feeling of the inevitable, or from the forlorn hope that seeing more of the fellow might be the only chance of curing her—he put no more obstacles in the way.

And the queer courtship began again. By Christmas she had consented, still under the impression that she was the mistress, not the slave—the cat, not the bird. Once or twice, when Fiorsen let passion out of hand and his overbold caresses affronted her, she recoiled almost with dread from what she was going towards. But, in general, she lived elated, intoxicated by music and his adoration, yet remorseful that she was making her father sad. She was but little at Mildenham, and he, in his unhappiness, was there nearly all the time, riding extra hard, and leaving Gyp with his sister. Aunt Rosamund, though under the spell of Fiorsen's music, had agreed with her brother that Fiorsen was "impossible." But nothing she said made any effect on Gyp. It was new and startling to discover in this soft, sensitive girl such a vein of stubbornness. Opposition seemed to harden her resolution. And the good lady's natural optimism began to persuade her that Gyp would make a silk purse out of that sow's ear yet. After all, the man was a celebrity in his way!

It was settled for February. A house with a garden was taken in St. John's Wood. The last month went, as all such last months go, in those intoxicating pastimes, the buying of furniture and clothes. If it were not for that, who knows how many engagement knots would slip!

And to-day they had been married. To the last Winton had hardly believed it would come to that. He had shaken the hand of her husband and kept pain and disappointment out of his face, knowing well that he deceived no one. Thank heaven, there had been no church, no wedding-cake, invitations, congratulations, fal-lals of any kind—he could never have stood them. Not even Rosamund—who had influenza—to put up with!

Lying back in the recesses of that old chair, he stared into the fire.

They would be just about at Torquay by now—just about. Music! Who would have thought noises made out of string and wood could have stolen her away from him? Yes, they would be at Torquay by now, at their hotel. And the first prayer Winton had uttered for years escaped his lips:

"Let her be happy! Let her be happy!"

Then, hearing Markey open the door, he closed his eyes and feigned sleep.

PART II

I

Gyp thought of her frock, a mushroom-coloured velvet cord. Not many girls in her class are married without "fal-lals," as Winton had called them. Not many girls sit in the corner of their reserved first-class compartments without the excitement of having been supreme centre of the world for some flattering hours to buoy them up on that train journey, with no memories of friends' behaviour, speech, appearance, to chat of with her husband, so as to keep thought away. For Gyp, her dress, first worn that day, Betty's breakdown, the faces, blank as hats, of the registrar and clerk, were all she had to distract her. She stole a look at him, clothed in blue serge, just opposite. Her husband! Mrs. Gustav Fiorsen! People might call her that; but to herself, she was Ghita Winton. The other would never seem right. And, not confessing that she was afraid to meet his eyes, yet afraid, she looked out of the window. A bleak, dismal day; no warmth, no sun, no music—the Thames grey as lead, the willows on its banks forlorn.

Suddenly she felt his hand on hers. She had not seen his face like that before—save once or twice when he was playing—a spirit shining through. She felt suddenly secure. If it stayed like that, then!—His hand rested on her knee; his face changed just a little; the spirit seemed to waver, to be fading; his lips grew fuller. He crossed over and sat beside her. She was tremulously glad of the corridor outside, and instantly began to talk about their house. In the hours they had spent together, up to now, he had been like a starved man snatching hasty meals; now that he had her to himself for good, he was another creature—a boy out of school.

He got down his practice violin, and putting on the mute, played. And when his face was turned away, she looked at him. He was much better-looking now than when he had his little whiskers. One day she had touched one and said: "If only these wings could fly!" Next morning they had flown. But she was not used to his face even yet, any more than to his touch.

At Torquay the sky was clear and starry; the wind brought whiffs of sea-scent into their cab; lights winked far out on a headland; and in the little harbour, all bluish dark, many little boats floated like tame birds. When the cab stopped and they entered the hall of the hotel, she whispered:

"Don't let's let them see!"

He let her go in demurely in front of him, saying:

"They shan't see—my Gyp. Oh, they shan't see! We are old married people, tired of each other—very!"

At dinner it amused him at first—her too, a little—to keep up this farce of indifference. But every now and then he turned and stared at some inoffensive visitor who was taking interest in them, with such fierce and genuine contempt, that Gyp took alarm. When she had drunk a little wine and he had drunk a good deal, the farce of indifference came to its end. He talked at a great rate, nicknaming the waiters, mimicking the people around—thrusts which made her smile but shiver, lest they should be heard or seen. Their heads were close together across the little table. They went out into the lounge. He wanted her to smoke with him. She had never smoked in a public room. But it seemed stiff and "missish" to refuse—she must do now as his world did. She drew back a window-curtain, and they stood there side by side. The sea was deep blue beneath bright stars, and the moon shone through a ragged pine-tree on a little headland. Though she stood five feet six in her shoes, she was only up to his mouth. He sighed and said: "Beautiful night, my Gyp!" And suddenly it struck her that she knew nothing of what was in him, and yet he was her husband! "Husband"—funny word, not pretty! She felt as a child opening the door of a dark room, and, clutching his arm, said:

"Look! There's a sailing-boat. What's it doing out there at night?"

Up in their sitting-room was a piano, but—not possible; to-morrow they would have to get another. To-morrow! The fire was hot, and he took off his coat to play. In one of his shirt-sleeves was a rent. She thought, with a sort of triumph: 'I shall mend that!' It was something definite, actual. There were lilies in the room which gave a strong, sweet scent. For a whole hour he played, and Gyp, in her cream-coloured frock, lay back, listening. She was tired, not sleepy. It would have been nice to have been sleepy. Her mouth had its little sad

tuck or dimple at the corner; her eyes were deep and dark—a cloudy child; and his gaze never left her face. At last he put away the violin.

"Go to bed, Gyp; you're tired."

Obediently she got up and went into the bedroom. With a sick feeling in her heart, and as near the fire as she could get, she undressed with desperate haste, and got to bed. She lay there shivering in her flimsy lawn against the cold sheets, her eyes not quite closed, watching the flicker of the firelight. She did not think—just lay still. The door creaked. She shut her eyes. Had she a heart at all? It did not seem to beat. She lay with eyes shut, till she could bear it no longer. By the firelight she saw him crouching at the foot of the bed; could just see his face—like a face—a face—where seen? Ah yes!—a picture—of a wild man crouching at the feet of Iphigenia—so humble, so hungry—so lost in gazing. She gave a little smothered sob and held out her hand.

II

Gyp was too proud to give by halves. And in those early days she gave Fiorsen everything except—her heart. She earnestly desired to give that too; but hearts only give themselves. Perhaps if the wild man in him, maddened by beauty in its power, had not so ousted the spirit man, her heart might have gone with her lips. He knew he was not getting her heart, and it made him, in the wildness of his nature and the perversity of a man, go just the wrong way to work, trying to conquer her by the senses, not the soul.

Yet she was not unhappy, except for a sort of lost feeling sometimes, as if she were trying to grasp something that kept slipping away. When he was playing, with the spirit-look on his face, she would feel: 'Now, now, surely I shall get close to him!' But the look would go; how to keep it there she did not know, and when it went, her feeling went too.

Their little suite of rooms was at the very end of the hotel, so that he might play as much as he wished. When he practised in the mornings she would go into the garden, which sloped in rock-terraces down to the sea. Wrapped in fur, she would sit there with a book. She soon knew each evergreen, or flower—aubretia, and laurustinus, a little white flower whose name was uncertain, and one star-periwinkle. The air was often soft; the birds sang already and were busy with their weddings, and twice, at least, spring came in her heart—that feeling when first the being scents new life preparing in the earth and the wind—the feeling which only comes when spring is not yet. Seagulls often came over her, craning down their greedy bills and uttering cries like a kitten's mewing.

She did not realise how she had grown up in these few days, how the ground bass had already come into the light music of her life. Living with Fiorsen was opening her eyes to much besides knowledge of "man's nature"; her, perhaps fatal, receptivity was already soaking up the atmosphere of his philosophy. He was always in revolt against accepting things because he was expected to; but, like most executant artists, he was no reasoner, just a mere instinctive kicker against the pricks. He would lose himself in a sunset, a scent, a tune, a new caress, in

a rush of pity for a beggar or a blind man, a rush of aversion from a man with large feet or a long nose, of hatred for a woman with a flat chest or an expression of sanctimony. He would swing along when he was walking, or dawdle, dawdle; he would sing and laugh, and make her laugh too till she ached, and half an hour later would sit staring into some pit of darkness in a sort of powerful brooding of his whole being. Insensibly she shared in this deep drinking of sensation, but always gracefully, fastidiously, never losing sense of other people's feelings.

In his love-raptures he just avoided setting her nerves on edge, because he never failed to make her feel his adoration of her beauty; that perpetual consciousness, too, of not belonging to the proper and respectable, which she had tried to explain to her father, set her against feeling shocked. But in other ways he did shock her. She could not get used to his oblivion of people's feelings, to the ferocious contempt with which he would look at those who got on his nerves, and make half-audible comments, just as he had commented on her own father when he and Count Rosek passed them, by the Schiller statue. She would visibly shrink at those remarks, though they were sometimes so funny that she had to laugh. She saw that he resented her shrinking; but it seemed to excite him to run amuck the more. Once she got up and walked away. He followed, sat on the floor beside her knees, and, like a great cat, thrust his head under her hand.

"Forgive me, my Gyp; but they are such brutes. Who could help it? Now tell me—who could, except my Gyp?" And she had to forgive him. But, one evening, when he had been really outrageous during dinner, she answered:

"No; I can't. It's you that are the brute."

He leaped up with a face of furious gloom and went out of the room. It was the first time he had given way to anger with her. Gyp sat by the fire, very disturbed; chiefly because she was not really upset at having hurt him. Surely she ought to be feeling miserable at that!

But when, at ten o'clock, he had not come back, she began to flutter. She had said a dreadful thing! Though, in her heart, she did not take back her judgment. This was the first time she had given free rein to her feeling against what Winton would have called his "bounderism." If he had been English, she would never have been attracted by one who could trample so on other people's feelings. What, then, had attracted her? His strangeness, wildness, the mesmeric pull of his passion for

her, his music! Nothing could spoil that in him. The sweep, the surge, and sigh in his playing was like the sea out there, dark, and surf-edged, beating on the rocks; or the sea deep-coloured in daylight, with white gulls over it; or the sea with those sinuous paths made by the wandering currents, the subtle, smiling, silent sea, holding in suspense an unfathomable restlessness, waiting to surge and spring again. That was what she wanted from him—not his embraces, not even his adoration, his wit, or his queer, lithe comeliness touched with felinity; no, only that in his soul which escaped through his fingers into the air and dragged at her soul. If, when he came in, she were to run to him, throw her arms round his neck, make herself feel close, lose herself in him! Why not? It was her duty; why not her delight, too? But she shivered. Some instinct too deep for analysis, something in the very heart of her nerves, made her recoil, as if she were afraid, literally scared of letting herself go, of loving—the subtlest instinct of self-preservation against something fatal; against being led on beyond—a curious, instinctive sinking, such as some feel at the sight of a precipice, a dread of going near, lest they be drawn on and over by resistless attraction.

She passed into their bedroom. To go to bed without knowing where he was, what doing, thinking, seemed already a little odd; and she sat brushing her hair slowly with the silver-backed brushes, staring at her own pale face, whose eyes looked so very large and dark. At last there came to her the feeling: 'I can't help it! I don't care!' And, getting into bed, she turned out the light. It seemed queer and lonely; there was no fire. And then, without more ado, she slept.

She had a dream of being between Fiorsen and her father in a railway-carriage out at sea, with the water rising higher and higher, swishing and sighing. Awakening always, like a dog, to perfect presence of mind, she knew that he was playing in the sitting-room, playing—at what time of night? She lay listening to the quivering, gibbering tune. Twice she half slipped out of bed, but both times, as if fate meant her not to move, he chose that moment to swell out the sound, and each time she thought: 'No, I can't. It's just the same now; he doesn't care how many people he wakes up. He does just what he likes, and cares nothing for anyone.' And covering her ears with her hands, she continued to lie motionless.

When she withdrew her hands at last, he had stopped. Then

she heard him coming, and feigned sleep. Next morning he seemed to have forgotten it all. But Gyp had not. She wanted badly to know what he had felt, where he had gone, but was too proud to ask.

She wrote twice to her father in the first week, but not afterwards, except for a postcard now and then. Why tell him what she was doing, in the company of one whom he could not bear to think of? Had he been right? To confess that would hurt her pride too much. But she began to long for London. Her new house was a green spot to dwell on. When they were settled in, and could do what they liked without anxiety about people's feelings, it would be all right perhaps. He would start again really working, she helping him, and all would be different. Her new house, her new garden, the fruit-trees coming into blossom! She would have dogs and cats, would ride when Dad was in Town. Aunt Rosamund would come, friends, evenings of music, dances still, perhaps—he danced beautifully. And his concerts—the elation of being identified with his success! Above all, the excitement of making her home as dainty as she could, with daring experiments in form and colour. And yet, at heart she knew that to be already looking forward was a bad sign.

One thing, at all events, she enjoyed—sailing. They had blue days when even the March sun was warm, and there was just breeze enough. He got on excellently well with the "old salt" whose boat they used, for he was at his best with simple folk.

In those hours Gyp had some real sensations of romance. The sea was blue, the rocks and wooded spurs of that Southern coast dreamy in the bright land-haze. Oblivious of the "old salt," he would put his arm round her; and she would be grateful for feeling nearer to him in spirit. She made loyal efforts to understand him in these weeks that were bringing a certain disillusionment. The elemental part of marriage was not the trouble; if she did not herself feel passion, she did not resent his. The trouble lay deeper—the sense of an insuperable barrier; and always that instinctive recoil from letting herself go. She could not let herself be known, and she could not get to know him. Why did his eyes often fix her with a stare that did not seem to see her? What made him, in the midst of serious playing, break into some furious or desolate little tune, or drop his violin? What gave him those long hours of dejection, following the maddest gaiety? Above all, what dreams had he in those rare moments when music transformed his strange pale face? Or

was it a mere physical illusion—had he any dreams? "The heart of another is a dark forest"—to all but the one who loves.

One morning he held up a letter.

"Ah, ha! Paul Rosek went to see our house. 'A pretty dove's nest!' he calls it."

The memory of his friend's sphinxlike, sweetish face, and eyes which seemed to know so many secrets, always affected Gyp unpleasantly. She said quietly:

"Why do you like him, Gustav?"

"Oh, he is useful. A good judge of music, and—many things."

"I think he is hateful."

Fiorsen laughed.

"Why hateful, my Gyp? He is a good friend. And he admires you—oh, he admires you very much! *Il dit qu'il a une technique merveilleuse* with women."

Gyp laughed.

"He's like a toad, I think."

"Ah, I shall tell him that! He will be flattered."

"If you do, I——"

He jumped up and caught her in his arms; his face was so comically compunctious that she calmed down at once. She thought over her words afterwards and regretted them. All the same, Rosek was a sneak and a cold sensualist, she was sure. And the thought that he had been spying at their little house tarnished her thoughts of it.

They went to Town three days later. While the taxi was skirting Lord's Cricket-ground, Gyp slipped her hand into Fiorsen's. She was brimful of excitement. The trees were budding in the garden, the almond-blossom coming! Now they were in the road. Five, seven, nine—thirteen! Two more! There it was, nineteen, in white figures on the leaf-green railings, under the small green lilac buds; and their almond-blossom was out, too! She could just see, over those tall railings, the low white house with its green outside shutters. She jumped out almost into the arms of Betty, who stood smiling all over her broad, flushed face, while, from under each arm peered forth a little black head, with pricked ears and eyes as bright as diamonds.

"Betty! What darlings!"

"Major Winton's present, my dear—ma'am!"

Giving the stout shoulders a hug, Gyp seized the Scotch terriers and ran up the path under the trellis, while the pups,

squeezed against her breast, made confused small noises and licked her nose and ears. Through the square hall she ran into the drawing-room, which opened out on to the lawn; and there, in the French window, stood, spying back at the spick-and-span room, where everything was placed just wrong. The colouring, white, ebony, and satinwood, looked nicer even that she had hoped. Out in the garden—her own garden—the pear-trees were thickening, but not in blossom yet; a few daffodils were in bloom along the walls, and a magnolia had one bud opened. And all the time she kept squeezing the puppies to her, enjoying their young, warm, fluffy savour. She ran out of the drawing-room, up the stairs. Oh, it was nice to be in your own place, to be—— Suddenly she felt herself lifted off the ground from behind, and in that undignified position, her eyes flying, she turned her face till he could reach her lips.

III

That first morning in her new house, Gyp woke with the sparrow, or whatever the bird which utters the first cheeps and twitters, soon eclipsed by so much that was more important in bird-song. All the feathered creatures in London seemed assembled in her garden; and the old verse came into her head:

> "All dear Nature's children sweet
> Lie at bride and bridegroom's feet,
> Blessing their sense.
> Not a creature of the air,
> Bird melodious or bird fair,
> Be absent hence!"

She turned and looked at Fiorsen. He lay with his head snoozled down into the pillow, so that she could only see his thick, rumpled hair. And a shiver went through her, exactly as if a strange man were lying there. Did he really belong to her, she to him—for good? Was this their house—together? It all seemed different, more serious and troubling, in this strange permanent bed, of this strange permanent room. Careful not to wake him, she slipped out and stood between the curtains and the window. Light was in confusion yet; away low down behind the trees, the rose of dawn still clung. One might almost have been in the country, but for the faint, rumorous noises of the town beginning to wake, and that film of ground-mist which veils the feet of London mornings. She was mistress in this house, had to direct it all—see to everything! And her pups! What did they eat?

That was the first of many hours of conscientious anxiety. Her fastidiousness desired perfection, but her sensitiveness refused to demand it of others—especially servants. Why should she harry them?

Fiorsen had not the faintest notion of regularity. He could not even begin to appreciate her struggles in housekeeping. And she was too proud to ask his help, or perhaps too wise, since he was obviously unfit to give it. To live like the birds of the air was his motto. Gyp would have liked nothing better; but it was difficult in a house with three servants, several meals, two

puppy-dogs, and no great experience of how to deal with any of them.

She spoke of her difficulties to no one. With Betty—who, bone-conservative, admitted Fiorsen as hardly as she had once admitted Winton—she had to be very careful. But her great trouble was with her father. She longed to see him, and literally dreaded the meeting. He first came—as he had been wont to come when she was a tiny girl—at the hour when he thought the fellow to whom she now belonged would most probably be out. She opened the door herself, and hung about him so that his shrewd eyes should not see her face. And she began at once to talk of the puppies, whom she had named Don and Doff. They were perfect darlings; nothing was safe from them; her slippers were completely done for; they had already got into her china-cabinet and gone to sleep there! He must come and see all over.

Talking all the time, she took him upstairs and down, out into the garden, to the studio, or music-room, at the end, which had an entrance to itself on to a back lane. This room had been the great attraction. Fiorsen could practise there in peace. Winton went with her very quietly, making a shrewd comment now and then. At the far end of the garden, looking over the wall, down into that narrow passage which lay between it and the back of another garden, he squeezed her arm suddenly.

"Well, Gyp, what sort of a time?"

"Oh, rather lovely—in some ways." But she did not look at him, nor he at her. "See, Dad! The cats have made quite a path there!"

Winton bit his lips and turned from the wall. The thought of that fellow was bitter within him. She meant to tell him nothing, meant to keep up that light-hearted look—which didn't deceive him!

"Look at my crocuses! It's really spring to-day!"

Even a bee or two had come. The tiny leaves had a transparent look, too thin as yet to keep the sunlight from passing through them. The purple, delicate-veined crocuses, with little flames of orange blowing from their centres, seemed to hold the light as in cups. A wind, without harshness, swung the boughs; a dry leaf or two still rustled round here and there. And on the grass, and in the blue sky, and on the almond-blossom was the first spring brilliance. Gyp clasped her hands.

"Lovely—to feel the spring!"

And Winton thought: 'She's changed!' She had softened, quickened—more depth of colour in her, more gravity, more sway in her body, more sweetness in her smile. But—was she happy?

A voice said:

"Ah, what a pleasure!"

The fellow had slunk up like the great cat he was. And it seemed to Winton that Gyp had winced.

"Dad thinks we ought to have dark curtains in the music-room, Gustav."

Fiorsen made a bow.

"Yes—yes—like a London club."

Winton, watching, was sure of supplication in her face. And, forcing a smile, he said:

"You seem very snug here. Glad to see you again. Gyp looks splendid."

Another of those bows he so detested! Mountebank! Never, never would he be able to stand the fellow! But he must not, would not, show it. And, as soon as he decently could, he went, picking his way back through this region, of which his knowledge was almost limited to Lord's Cricket-ground, in doubt and desolation, with the resolve to be always at hand if the child wanted him.

He had not been gone ten minutes before Aunt Rosamund appeared, with a crutch-handled stick and a gentlemanly limp, for she, too, suffered from gout. The good lady had not known how fond she was of her niece till the girl had slipped off into this marriage. She wanted her back, to go about with and make much of, as before. And her drawl did not quite disguise this feeling.

Gyp could detect Fiorsen subtly mimicking that drawl; and her ears began to burn. The puppies, their points, noses, boldness, and food, held the danger in abeyance for some minutes. Then the mimicry began again. When Aunt Rosamund had taken a somewhat sudden leave, Gyp stood at the window of her drawing-room with the mask off her face. Fiorsen came up, put his arm round her, and said with a fierce sigh:

"Are they coming often—these excellent people?"

Gyp drew back.

"If you love me, why do you try to hurt the people who love me too?"

"Because I am jealous. I am jealous even of those puppies."

"And shall you try to hurt them?"

"If I see them too much near you."

"Do you think I can be happy if you hurt things because they love me?"

The first time—the very first friend to come into her new home! It was too much!

Fiorsen said hoarsely:

"You do not love me. If you loved me, I should feel it through your lips. I should see it in your eyes. Oh, love me, Gyp! You shall!"

But to say to Love: "Stand and deliver!" seemed to her mere ill-bred stupidity. She froze against him in soul. When a woman refuses nothing to one whom she does not really love, shadows are already falling on the bride-house. And Fiorsen knew it; but his self-control scarcely equalled that of the two puppies.

Yet, on the whole, these first weeks in her new home were too busy to allow much room for doubting or regret. Several important concerts were fixed for May. She looked forward to these with intense eagerness, and pushed everything that interfered with preparation into the background. As though to make up for that instinctive recoil from giving him her heart, of which she was always subconscious, she gave him all her activities, without calculation or reserve. She was ready to play for him all day and every day. But she had some free hours in the morning, for he lay in bed till eleven, and was never ready for practice before twelve. In those early hours she got through her orders and her shopping—to so many women the only real "sport"—a chase of the ideal; a pitting of taste and knowledge against that of the world at large; a secret passion for making themselves more beautiful. Gyp never went shopping without a faint thrill running up and down her nerves. She hated to be touched by strange fingers, but not even that stopped her pleasure in turning and turning before long mirrors, while the saleswoman ran the tips of fingers over her, smoothing and pinning, and uttering the word "moddam."

On other mornings, she rode with her father. One day, after riding in Richmond Park, they had late breakfast on the verandah of an hotel. Some fruit-trees were still in blossom just below them, and the sunlight brightened to silver the windings of the river, and to gold the budding leaves of the oak-trees. Winton, smoking his after-breakfast cigar, stared down across

the tops of those trees towards the river; and stealing a glance at him, Gyp said softly:

"Did you ever ride with my mother, Dad?"

"Once—the very ride we've been to-day. She was on a black mare; I had a chestnut——" In that grove on the little hill through which they had ridden that morning, he had dismounted and stood beside her!

Gyp stretched her hand across the table.

"Tell me about her. Was she beautiful?"

"Yes."

"Dark? Tall?"

"Very like you, Gyp. A little—a little"—he did not know how to describe that difference—"a little more foreign-looking, perhaps. One of her grandmothers was Italian, you know."

"How did you come to love her? Suddenly?"

"As suddenly as"—he drew his hand away and laid it on the verandah rail—"that sun came on my hand."

Gyp said, as if to herself:

"Yes; I don't think I understand that—yet. Did she love you at first sight, too?"

"One easily believes what one wants to—but she used to say so."

"And how long?"

"Only a year."

"Oh, Dad! I can't bear to think I killed her—I can't bear it!"

Winton got up, and a startled blackbird ceased his song. Gyp went on in a hard voice:

"I don't want to have any children. And I don't—I don't want to love like that. I should be afraid."

Winton looked at her, frowning over his past.

"Love," he said, "it catches you, and you're gone. When it comes, you welcome it, whether it's to kill you or not."

When she got home it was not quite noon. She hurried over her bath and dressing, and ran out to the music-room. Its walls had been hung with Willesden scrim and gilded; the curtains were silver-grey; there was a divan covered with silver-and-gold stuff, and a beaten brass fireplace. It was a study in silver and gold, save for two touches of fantasy—a screen round the piano-head, covered with brilliantly painted peacocks' tails, and a blue Persian vase, in which were flowers of various hues of red.

Fiorsen was standing at the window, smoking. He did not turn. Gyp put her hand within his arm.

"So sorry. But it's only just half-past twelve."

His face was as if the whole world had injured him.

"Pity you came back! Very nice, riding, I'm sure!"

Could she not go riding with her own father? What insensate jealousy and egomania! And, without a word, she sat down at the piano. She was not good at standing injustice—and he smelled of brandy! Drink in the morning was ugly—horrid! She sat at the piano, waiting. He would be like this till he had played away the fumes of his ill mood, and then he would come and paw her shoulders and put his lips to her neck. It was not the way to behave, not the way to make her love him. And she said suddenly:

"Gustav; what exactly have I done that you dislike?"

"You have had a father."

Gyp began to laugh. He looked so like a sulky child, standing there. He turned swiftly on her and clapped his hand over her mouth. She looked up over that hand. Her heart was doing the *grand écart* within her, this way in compunction, that way in resentment. His eyes fell before hers; he removed his hand.

"Well, shall we begin?" she said.

He answered roughly: "No," and went out into the garden.

Was it possible that she could have taken part in such a horrid little scene? She remained sitting at the piano, playing over and over a single passage, without heeding what it was.

IV

So far, they had seen nothing of Rosek. She wondered if Fiorsen had passed on to him her remark, but did not ask; having learned that her husband spoke the truth when convenient, not when it caused him pain. About music, or art, however, he could be implicitly relied on; and his frankness was appalling when his nerves were ruffled.

At the first concert she saw Rosek's unwelcome figure on the other side of the gangway, two rows back. He was talking to a young girl, whose face, short and beautifully formed, had the opaque transparency of alabaster. With her round blue eyes fixed on him, and her lips just parted, she had a slightly vacant look. Her laugh, too, was just a little vacant. And yet her features were so beautiful, her hair so smooth and fair, her colouring so pale and fine, her neck so white and round, the poise of her body so perfect, that Gyp found it difficult to take her glance away. She was sitting alone, wanting so much to feel again the sensations of Wiesbaden. There would be a kind of solemn pleasure in knowing that she had helped to fashion sounds which moved so many listeners. She had looked forward to this concert eagerly. And she sat, abstracted from consciousness of those about her, soft and still.

Fiorsen looked his worst, as ever, when first coming before an audience—cold, furtive, defensive, defiant, half turned away, with those long fingers tightening the screws, touching the strings. Wiesbaden! No; this was not like Wiesbaden! And when he played, she had not the same emotions. She had heard him now too often, knew too exactly how he produced those sounds; knew that their fire and sweetness and nobility sprang from fingers, ear, brain—not from his soul. Nor was it possible any longer to drift off on those currents of sound into new worlds, to hear bells at dawn, and the dews of evening as they fell, to feel the freshness of wind and the fire of sunlight. Romance and ecstasy came no more. She was watching for the weak spots, the passages with which he had struggled and she had struggled; she was distracted by memories of petulance, black moods, and sudden caresses. And then she caught his eye. The look was like, yet now unlike, those looks at Wiesbaden. It had lost the

adoration. And she thought: 'Is it my fault, or is it only because he has me now to do what he likes with?' It was all another disillusionment, perhaps the greatest yet. But she kindled at the applause, and lost herself in the pleasure of his success. At the interval, she went round to the artists' room. He was coming down from his last recall; his look of bored contempt vanished, and, lifting her hand, he kissed it. She whispered:

"Beautiful!"

And he whispered back:

"Do you love me, Gyp?"

She nodded. And at that moment she thought she did.

Then people began to come; amongst them her old music-master, Monsieur Harmost, who, after a *"Merveilleux, très fort"* to Fiorsen, turned his back on him to talk to Gyp.

So she had married Fiorsen. That was extraordinary, but extraordinary! And what was it like—a little funny—not so? Her music would be spoiled now—what a pity! No? She must come to him, then; yes, come again. All the time he patted her arm, as if playing the piano, and his fingers felt the firmness of her flesh, as though debating whether she were letting it deteriorate. He seemed really to have missed his old pupil, to be glad at seeing her again; and Gyp never could withstand appreciation. More people came. She saw Rosek talking to her husband, and the alabaster girl standing silent, her lips still parted, gazing at Fiorsen. A perfect figure, rather short; a dovelike face, whose exquisitely shaped, just opened lips seemed to be demanding sugar-plums. Not more than nineteen—who was she?

A voice said:

"How do you do, Mrs. Fiorsen? I am fortunate to see you again at last."

If Gustav had given her away, one would never know it from this masked creature, Rosek, with his suave watchful composure, who talked so smoothly. What did she so dislike in him? Gyp had acute instincts, the natural intelligence of a nature not over-intellectual, whose "feelers" were too delicate to be deceived.

Following his glance, she saw her husband talking to the girl, whose lips seemed more than ever asking for sugar-plums.

"Do you admire her, Madame—that young dancer, Daphne Wing—she will make a name. A dove flying!"

"She's very pretty—I can imagine her dancing beautifully."

"Come one day and see her? She has still to make her *début*."

Gyp answered:

"Thank you."

But she thought: 'I don't want to have anything to do with you! Why didn't I say I hate dancing?'

A bell sounded; people began hurrying away. The girl came up.

"Miss Daphne Wing—Mrs. Fiorsen."

Gyp put out her hand with a smile. Miss Daphne Wing smiled, too, and said, with the intonation of those whose accents have been carefully corrected:

"Oh, Mrs. Fiorsen, how beautifully your husband plays—doesn't he?"

Not merely at the careful speech, but at something lacking when the mouth moved, Gyp felt sorry, as at blight on a perfect flower. With a nod, she turned to Fiorsen, now waiting to go on to the platform. Was it at her or at the girl he had been looking? In the corridor, Rosek said:

"Come with Gustav to my rooms to-day. She shall dance for us. She admires you, Madame."

Gyp longed for the simple brutality to say: "I don't want to come." But all she could manage was:

"Thank you. I'll ask Gustav."

Once back in her seat, she rubbed the cheek his breath had touched. A girl was singing now—one of those faces Gyp always admired, reddish-gold hair, blue eyes—the antithesis of herself—and the song was "The Bens of Jura," that strange outpouring from a heart broken by love:

"And my heart reft of its own sun——"

The shiver of some very deep response passed through her. Dad had said: "Love catches you, and you're gone!"

No! she, who was the result of love like that, did not want to love!

The girl finished. There was little applause. She had sung beautifully one of the most wonderful songs in the world—was it too tragic, too painful, too strange—not "pretty" enough? Gyp felt sorry for her. She would have liked to slip away. But she had not the needful rudeness. She would have to wait, and

go through with this evening at Rosek's. She had entered of her own free will on a life which would not give her a feeling of anchorage or home. Of her own accord she had stepped into the cage!

On the way to Rosek's, she disguised from Fiorsen her headache and depression. He was in one of his boy-out-of-school moods, elated by applause, mimicking her old master, the idolatries of his worshippers, Rosek, the girl dancer's upturned lips. And he slipped his arm round Gyp in the cab, crushing her against him and sniffing at her cheek as if she had been a flower.

Rosek had the first floor of an old mansion in Russell Square. Incense, or some kindred perfume, was at once about one; and, on the walls of the dark hall, electric light burned, in jars of alabaster picked up in the East. The place was a sanctum of the collector's spirit. Its owner had a passion for black—the walls, divans, picture-frames, even some of the tilings were black, with glimmerings of gold, ivory, and moonlight. On a round black table was a golden bowl filled with moonlight-coloured velvety "palm" and "honesty"; on a black wall gleamed the ivory mask of a faun's face; from a dark niche the little silver figure of a dancing girl. It was beautiful, but deathly. And Gyp, though excited by anything new, alive to all beauty, longed for air and sunlight. It was a relief, close to one of the black-curtained windows, to watch the westering sun shower light on the trees of the Square gardens. She was introduced to a Mr. and Mrs. Gallant, a dark-faced, cynical-looking man with clever, malicious eyes, and a cornucopia of a woman with an avid blue stare. The little dancer had "gone to put on nothing," Rosek informed them.

He took Gyp the round of his treasures, scarabs, Rops drawings, death-masks, Chinese pictures, and queer old flutes, with an air of displaying them for the first time to one who could truly appreciate. Her instinct apprehended the refined viciousness of this place, where nothing, save taste, would be sacred. It was her first glimpse into gilt-edged Bohemia, whence the generosities, *élans,* struggles of Bohemia proper, are excluded as from the spheres where bishops move. But no one could have told that her nerves were crisping as at contact with a corpse. While showing her those alabaster jars, Rosek laid his hand softly on her wrist, and in taking it away, let his fingers, softer than a kitten's paw, ripple over the skin, then put them to his

lips. *Technique!* A desperate desire to laugh seized her. And he saw it. He gave her one look, passed his hand over his face, and—behold!—it showed as before, unmortified, unconscious. A deadly little man!

When they returned to the *salon,* as it was called, Miss Daphne Wing, in a black kimono, whence her face and arms emerged more like alabaster than ever, was sitting on a divan beside Fiorsen. She rose at once and came across to Gyp.

"Oh, Mrs. Fiorsen"—why did everything she said begin with "Oh!"—"isn't this room lovely? It's perfect for dancing. I only brought cream, and flame-colour; they go so beautifully with black."

She threw back her kimono for Gyp to inspect her dress—a girdled cream-coloured shift; and her mouth opened, as if for a sugar-plum of praise. She murmured:

"I'm rather afraid of Count Rosek."

"Why?"

"Oh, he's so critical, and smooth, and he comes up so quietly. I do think your husband plays wonderfully. Oh, Mrs. Fiorsen, you are beautiful, aren't you? What would you like me to dance first? A waltz of Chopin's?"

"I love Chopin."

"Then I shall. I shall dance exactly what you like, because I do admire you, and I'm sure you're awfully sweet. Oh, yes; I can see it. And your husband's awfully in love with you. You know, I've been studying five years, and I haven't come out yet. But now Count Rosek's going to back me, I expect it'll be very soon. Will you come to my first night? Mother says I've got to be awfully careful. She only let me come this evening because you were going to be here. Would you like me to begin?"

She slid across to Rosek:

"Oh, Mrs. Fiorsen wants me to begin; a Chopin waltz, please. The one that goes like this."

Gyp sat down beside Fiorsen, and Rosek began playing, his eyes fixed on the girl, and his mouth loosened from compression in a sweetish smile. Miss Daphne Wing was standing with her finger-tips joined at her breast—a statue of ebony and pale wax. She flung away the black kimono and a thrill swept through Gyp. She *could* dance—that common little girl! Every movement of her round, sinuous limbs had the ecstasy of natural genius, controlled by the quivering balance of a fine training. "A dove flying!" Her face had lost its vacancy, or rather its vacancy

had become divine, having that look—not lost but gone before—which dance demands. Tears came up in Gyp's eyes. It was lovely—as when a dove flings itself up in the wind, breasting on with wings bent back, and poised.

When, after the dance, the girl came and sat down beside her, Gyp squeezed her hot little hand, but the caress was for her art, not for this moist little person with the lips avid of sugar-plums.

"Oh, did you like it? I'm so glad. Shall I go and put on my flame-colour, now?"

The moment she was gone, comment broke out. The dark and cynical Gallant thought her dancing like a certain Napierkowska's seen in Moscow, but it had no fire—the touch of passion would have to be supplied. She wanted love! Love! And suddenly Gyp was back in the concert-hall, listening to that other girl singing the song of a broken heart.

> **"Thy kiss, dear love—**
> **Like watercress gathered fresh from cool streams."**

Love! in this abode—of fauns' heads, deep cushions, silver dancing girls! Love! She had a sudden sense of deep abasement. What was she, herself, but just a feast for a man's senses? Her home, what but a place like this? Daphne Wing was back again. Gyp looked at her husband's face while she was dancing. It——! How was it that she could see that disturbance in him, and not care? If she had really loved him, to see his lips like that would have hurt her, but she might have understood, perhaps, and forgiven. Now she neither quite understood nor quite forgave.

And that night she murmured:

"Would you rather I were that girl—not me?"

"That girl! I could swallow her at a draught. But you, my Gyp—I want to drink for ever!"

Was that true? *If* she had loved him—how good to hear!

V

After this, Gyp was daily more and more in contact with high Bohemia, that curious composite section of society which embraces the neck of music, poetry, and the drama. She felt that she did not belong to it, nor, in truth, did Fiorsen, who was much too genuine a Bohemian, and mocked at the Gallants and even the Roseks of this life, as he mocked at Winton, Aunt Rosamund, and their world. Life with him made Gyp, too, feel less and less a part of that old orthodox, well-bred world which she had known before she married him; but to which she had never felt that she belonged, since she knew the secret of her birth. She was, in truth, much too impressionable and naturally critical to accept the dictates of fact-and-form-governed routine; though, of her own accord, she would never have had initiative enough to step out of its circle. Loosened from those roots, unable to attach herself to this new soil, and not spiritually leagued with her husband, she was more and more lonely. Her only truly happy hours were those spent with Winton or at her piano. She was always wondering at what she had done, longing to find the deep, the sufficient reason for ever having done it. But the more she sought and longed, the deeper grew her bewildered feeling of being in a cage. Of late, too, another and more definite uneasiness had come to her.

She spent much time in her garden, where the blossoms had all dropped, the lilac was over, acacias coming into bloom, and blackbirds silent.

Winton, who, by careful experiment, had found that from half-past three to six there was little chance of stumbling across his son-in-law, came nearly every day for tea and a quiet cigar on the lawn. He was sitting there with Gyp, when Betty brought out a card on which were printed the words "Miss Daphne Wing."

"Bring her out, please, Betty, and some fresh tea, and plenty of buttered toast; and the chocolates, and any other sweets—Betty darling."

Betty, with the expression which always came over her when called "darling," withdrew across the grass, and Gyp said to her father:

"It's the little dancer I told you of, Dad. Now you'll see something perfect. Only, she'll be dressed. What a pity!"

She was. In warm ivory, shrouded by leaf-green chiffon, with a girdle of tiny artificial leaves, and a head encircled by other green leaves, she was like a nymph peering from a bower. If rather too arresting, it was charming, and no frock could disguise the beauty of her figure. She was evidently nervous.

"Oh, Mrs. Fiorsen, I thought you wouldn't mind my coming. I did so want to see you again. Count Rosek said he thought I might. It's all fixed for my coming-out. Oh, how do you do?" With lips and eyes opening, she sat down in the chair Winton placed for her. Gyp, watching his expression, felt inclined to laugh. Dad, and Daphne Wing!

"Have you been dancing at Count Rosek's again lately?"

"Oh, yes, haven't you—didn't you—I—— Oh! yes!"

The thought flashed through Gyp, 'So Gustav's been seeing her, and hasn't told me!' But she said at once:

"Of course; I forgot. When is your 'coming-out'?"

"Next Friday week. At the Octagon. Isn't it splendid? They've given me such a good engagement. I do so want you and Mr. Fiorsen to come, though!"

"Of course we will. My father loves dancing, too; don't you, Dad?"

"When it's good," said Winton urbanely.

"Oh, mine *is* good; isn't it, Mrs. Fiorsen? I mean, I *have* worked—ever since I was thirteen, you know. I simply love it. I think *you* would dance beautifully, Mrs. Fiorsen. You've got such a perfect figure. I simply love to see you walk."

Gyp flushed.

"Do have one of these, Miss Wing—they've got whole raspberries inside."

The little dancer put one in her mouth.

"Oh, but please don't call me Miss Wing! Do call me Daphne. Mr. Fior—everybody does."

Conscious of her father's face, Gyp murmured:

"It's a lovely name. Won't you have another? These are apricot."

"They're perfect. You know, my first dress is to be all orange-blossom; Mr. Fiorsen suggested that. But I expect he told you. Perhaps *you* suggested it really; did you?" Gyp shook her head. "Count Rosek says the world is waiting for

me——" She paused with a sugar-plum half-way to her lips, and added: "Do you think it is?"

"I hope so."

"He says I'm something new. It would be nice to think that. He has great taste; so has Mr. Fiorsen, hasn't he?"

Conscious of compression behind the smoke of her father's cigar, Gyp nodded.

The little dancer placed the sweet in her mouth.

"You see, he married you."

Then, conscious of Winton's eyes fixed on her, she became confused, and said:

"Oh, and isn't it lovely here—like the country! I'm afraid I must go; it's my practice time. It's so important for me not to miss any now, isn't it?" She rose, and Winton got up too. Gyp saw her eyes, lighting on his rigid hand, grow rounder; her careful voice floated back:

"Oh, I do hope——" But what, could not be heard.

Gyp sat motionless. Bees were murmurous among her flowers, pigeons among the trees; the sunlight warmed her knees, and her stretched-out feet through the openwork of her stockings. The maid's laughter, the growling of the puppies at play in the kitchen, came drifting down the garden, with the distant cry of a milkman up the road. All was very peaceful. But in her heart were curious emotions, strange, tangled feelings. This enlightenment regarding the measure of her husband's frankness came on the heels of another revelation. She had said to Winton that she did not want to have a child. In her whose birth had caused her mother's death there was this more or less unconscious aversion. And now she was sure one was coming. She had not reached, knew she could not reach, that spiritual union which might have made the thought of motherhood a joy. She was fairly caught in the web of her foolish and presumptuous mistake! In a few months of marriage she was sure it was a failure, and hopeless for the future! A hard, natural fact is needed to bring to a yearning and bewildered spirit knowledge of the truth. Disillusionment is not welcome, especially when it is disillusionment with self, as well as with another. She had been going to—what?—save Fiorsen from himself! It was laughable. She had only lost herself. Already she felt in prison, and by a child would be all the more bound. To some women the knowledge that a thing must be assuages the nerves. Gyp

was the opposite of those. To force her was the way to stir up every contrary emotion.

And so, while the pigeons cooed and the sunlight warmed her feet, she spent the bitterest moments of her life—so far. Pride came to her help. No one must know—certainly not her father, who had warned her so desperately! She had made her bed, and would have to lie on it.

When Winton came back, he said:

"I don't see the fascination, Gyp."

"Don't you think her face really rather perfect?"

"Common."

"Yes; but that drops off when she's dancing."

Winton looked at her from under half-closed eyelids.

"What does Fiorsen think of her?"

"Does he think of her? I don't know."

She could feel the watchful tightening of his face.

"Daphne Wing! By George!"

The words were resentment and distrust incarnate. His daughter in peril from—such as that!

After he was gone Gyp sat on till the sun had gone, and the dew was stealing through her thin frock. To make others happy was the way to be happy—they said. She would try. Betty—so stout, and with that rheumatism in her leg—did she ever think of herself? Or Aunt Rosamund, with her perpetual rescuings of lost dogs, lame horses, and penniless musicians? And Dad, for all his man-of-the-world ways, was he not always doing little things for the men of his old regiment, always thinking of her, too, and what he could do to give her pleasure? To love people, and bring them happiness! Was it possible? People were hard to love, different from birds, beasts and flowers, to love which seemed natural and easy.

She went up and began to dress for dinner. Which of her frocks did he like best? The pale, low-cut amber, or that white, soft one, with the coffee-dipped lace? She decided on the latter. Scrutinising her image in the glass, she shuddered. That would all go; she would become like those women, who made her wonder at their hardihood in showing themselves. Why must one become unsightly in order to bring life into the world? Some women seemed proud to be like that. But she would never dare to show herself in the days coming.

She finished dressing and went downstairs. Fiorsen had not come in. She turned from the window with a sigh of relief,

and went in to dinner. She ate with the two pups beside her, sent them off, and sat down at her piano. And Betty, who had a weakness for Chopin, sat by the door which partitioned off the back premises, imagining her "pretty" in her white frock, with the candle-flames on each side, and those lovely lilies in the vase close by, smelling beautiful. And one of the maids coming too near, she shooed her away.

It grew late. The maids had gone to bed. Gyp had long stopped playing, and, by the French window, stood gazing out into the dark. How warm it was—warm enough to draw forth the scent of the jessamine along the garden wall! Not a star. There always seemed so few stars in London. A sound made her swing round. Something tall was over there in the dark room, by the open door. She called out, frightened:

"Is that you, Gustav?"

He spoke some words that she could not understand. Shutting the window quickly, she went toward him. The hall light fell on one side of his face. He was pale; his eyes shone strangely; his sleeve was whitened. He muttered thickly:

"Little ghost!" It was the first time Gyp had ever come to close quarters with drunkenness. How awful if anybody were to see—how awful! She made a rush to get into the hall and lock the door leading to the back regions, but he clutched her shoulder. She stopped dead, fearing to make a noise or pull him over, and his other hand clutched her other shoulder, so that he stood steadying himself by her. She was not shocked. She only felt: 'What am I to do? How get him upstairs without anyone knowing?' And she looked up into his face—which seemed to her pathetic with its shining eyes and its staring whiteness. She said gently:

"It's all right. Lean on me; we'll go up."

More than disgust, she felt a horrid pity. Putting her arm round his waist, she moved with him towards the stairs. If only no one heard; if only she could get him quietly up! And she murmured:

"Don't talk; lean on me!"

He seemed to make an effort; puffing out his lips with an expression that would have been comic if not so tragic.

Holding him with all her strength, she began to mount. It was easier than she had thought. Across the landing, into the bedroom, and the danger would be over! Done! He was lying across the bed, and the door shut. Then she gave way to a

fit of shivering so violent that she could hear her teeth chattering. She caught sight of herself in the big mirror. Her pretty lace was torn; her shoulders red where his hands had gripped her, holding himself up. She put on a wrapper and went up to him. He was in a sort of stupor, and with difficulty she got him to sit up and lean against the bed-rail, racking her brains for what to give him. Sal volatile! Surely that must be right. When at last he was in bed, she stood looking at him. His eyes were closed; he would not see if she gave way now. But she would not cry. There was nothing to be done but get into bed too. She undressed, and turned out the light. He was in a stertorous sleep. And, staring into the dark, Gyp smiled. She was thinking of all those young wives, in novels, who, blushing, trembling, murmur into the ears of their young husbands that they "have something—something to tell them!"

VI

Looking at Fiorsen, next morning, still sunk in heavy sleep, her first thought was: 'He looks exactly the same.' And, suddenly, it seemed queer to her that she had not been, and still was not, disgusted. It was too deep for disgust, and somehow, too natural. She took this new revelation of his unbridled ways without resentment. Besides, she had long known of this taste of his—one cannot drink brandy and not betray it.

She stole from bed, gathered up his boots and clothes all tumbled on to a chair, and took them forth to the dressing-room. There she held the garments up to the early light and brushed them, then, noiseless, stole back to bed, with needle and thread and her lace. No one must know; not even he must know. For the moment she had forgotten that other thing so terrifically important. It came back to her, very sudden, very sickening. So long as she could keep it secret, no one should know that either—he least of all.

The morning passed as usual; but when she came to the music-room at noon, she found that he had gone out. She was just sitting down to lunch when her maid announced:

"Count Rosek."

Gyp got up, startled.

"Say that Mr. Fiorsen is not in. But—but ask if he will have some lunch, and get a bottle of hock."

In the few seconds before he appeared, she experienced the excitement one has entering a field where a bull is grazing.

Not even his severest critics could accuse Rosek of want of tact. He had hoped to see Gustav, it was charming of her to give him lunch.

He seemed to have renounced his corsets, and some of his offending looks. His face was slightly browned, as if he had been taking his due of air and sun. He talked without cynical submeanings, was appreciative of her "charming house," showed warmth in his sayings about art and music. Gyp had never disliked him less. After lunch, they went across the garden to the music-room, and he sat down at the piano. He had that deep, caressing touch that lies in fingers of steel worked by a real passion for tone. Gyp sat on the divan. She was out of

his sight there; and she looked at him, wondering. He was playing Schumann's Child Music. How could one who produced such idyllic sounds have sinister intentions? And presently she said:

"Count Rosek!"

"Madame?"

"Will you tell me why you sent Daphne Wing here yesterday?"

"I?"

"Yes."

He swung round on the music-stool and looked full at her.

"Since you ask me, I thought you should know that Gustav is seeing a good deal of her."

He had given the exact answer she had divined.

"Why should I mind that?"

He got up and said quietly:

"I am glad that you do not."

"Why glad?"

She, too, had risen. Though he was little taller than herself, she was conscious of how thick and steely he was beneath his dapper garments, and of a kind of snaky will-power in his face. Her heart beat fast.

He came toward her.

"I am glad you understand that it is over with Gustav—finished——" He stopped, seeing that he had gone wrong, and not knowing quite where. Gyp had simply smiled. A flush coloured his cheeks.

"He is a volcano soon extinguished. You see, I know him. Better you should know him, too."

"Why?"

He said between his teeth:

"That you may not waste your time; there is love waiting for you."

Gyp smiled.

"Was it from love of me that you made him drunk last night?"

"Gyp!" Gyp turned. But he was between her and the door. "You never loved him. That is my excuse. You have given him too much already—more than he is worth. Ah! God! I am tortured by you; I am possessed."

He had gone suddenly quite white, save for his smouldering eyes. She was afraid, and, because she was afraid, she stood

her ground. Should she make a dash for the door that opened into the little lane? She could feel that he was trying to break through her defences by sheer intensity of gaze—by a kind of mesmerism, knowing that he had frightened her.

Whether or no he really moved his feet, he seemed coming closer inch by inch. She had a horrible feeling—as if his arms were already round her.

She wrenched her gaze from his, and suddenly his crisp hair caught her eyes. Surely—surely it was curled with tongs! Almost inaudibly, the words escaped her lips: *"Une technique merveilleuse!"* His eyes wavered; his lips fell apart. Gyp walked across the room and put her hand on the bell. She had lost all fear. And without a word, he turned, and went out into the garden. She watched him cross the lawn. She had beaten him by the one thing not even violent passions can withstand—ridicule. Was it possible that she had really been frightened, nearly failing in that encounter, nearly dominated by that man—in her own house, with her own maids down there at hand?

In the garden was the first real warmth of summer. Mid-June of a fine year—the air drowsy with hum and scent.

And, sitting in the shade, while the puppies rolled and snapped, Gyp searched her little world for sense of safety; as if all round her were a hot, heavy fog in which things lurked, and she held them away only by pride and the will not to cry out that she was struggling and afraid.

Fiorsen, leaving his house that morning, had walked till he saw a taxi-cab. Leaning back therein, with hat thrown off, he caused himself to be driven rapidly, at random. This was one of his habits when his mind was not at ease. The motion was sedative. And he needed sedatives this morning. To wake in his own bed without remembering how he had got there, was no more new to him than to many another man of twenty-eight, but it was new since his marriage. If he had remembered even less, he would have been more at ease. But he could just recollect standing in the dark drawing-room, seeing a ghostly Gyp quite close to him. Somehow, he was afraid; and, when afraid—like most people—was at his worst.

If she had resembled other women in whose company he had eaten passion-fruit, he would not have felt this carking humiliation. If she had been like them, he would already have "fin-

ished," as Rosek had said. But he knew well enough that he had not "finished." He might get drunk, might be loose in every way, but Gyp was hooked into his senses. Her passivity was her strength, the secret of her magnetism. In her, he felt that mysterious sentiency of nature, which, even in yielding to man's fevers, lies apart with a faint smile—the uncapturable smile of the woods and fields by day or night, the unfathomable, soft, vibrating indifference of the flowers and trees and streams, of the rocks, of bird-songs, and the eternal hum, under sunshine or starshine. Her dark, half-smiling eyes enticed him, inspired an unquenchable thirst. And his was one of those natures which, encountering spiritual difficulty, at once jib off, seek anodynes, try to bandage wounded egoism with excess—a spoiled child, with the desperations and the inherent pathos, the something repulsive and the something lovable which belong to all such. Having wished for this moon, and got her, he now did not know what to do with her, kept grasping at her, with a feeling all the time of getting further and further away. His failure to get near her spiritually drove him toward folly. Only work kept him in control at all. For he did work hard; though, even there, something was lacking. He had all the qualities of making good, except the moral backbone, which alone could give him his rightful—as he thought—pre-eminence. It often surprised and vexed him to find that some contemporary held higher rank than himself.

In his cab, he mused:

'Did I do anything that really shocked her last night? Why didn't I wait for her this morning and find out the worst?' And he smiled wryly—to find out the worst was not his forte. Meditation, seeking as usual a scapegoat, lighted on Rosek. Like most egoists addicted to women, he had not many friends. Rosek was the most constant. But even for him, Fiorsen had at once the contempt and fear that a man naturally uncontrolled and yet of greater scope has for one of less talent but stronger will-power. He treated him as a wayward child treats its nurse; and needed him as a patron with well-lined pockets.

'Curse Paul!' he thought. 'He must know—he does know—that brandy of his goes down like water. He saw I was getting silly! He had some game on. Where did I go after? How did I get home? Did I hurt Gyp?' If the servants had seen—it would upset her fearfully! He had a fresh access of fear. He didn't know her, never knew what she was thinking or feeling,

never knew anything about her. It was not fair! He didn't hide himself from her. He was as free as nature; he let her see everything. What had he done? The maid had looked very queerly at him that morning! And suddenly he said to the driver: "Bury Street, St. James's." He could find out, at all events, whether Gyp had been to her father's. He changed his mind several times before the cab reached that little street; and a light sweat broke out on his forehead while he was waiting for the door to be opened.

"Mrs. Fiorsen here?"

"No, sir."

"Not been this morning?"

"No, sir."

He shrugged away the thought that he ought to give some explanation of his question, and got into the cab again, telling the man to drive to Curzon Street. If she had not been to "that Aunt Rosamund" either, it would be all right—there was no one else she would go to. She had not. And, with a sigh of relief, he began to want breakfast. He would go to Rosek's, borrow the money to pay his cab, and lunch there. Rosek was not in. He would have to go home to get the cab paid. The driver seemed to eye him queerly now, as though conceiving doubts about the fare.

Under the trellis, Fiorsen passed a man with a long envelope in his hand.

Gyp was sitting at her bureau adding up the counterfoils in her cheque-book. She did not turn round.

"Is there any lunch?" he said.

She reached out and rang the bell. He felt sorry for himself. He had been quite ready to take her in his arms and say: "Forgive me, little Gyp; I'm sorry!"

Betty answered the bell.

"Please bring up some lunch for Mr. Fiorsen."

He heard the stout woman sniff as she went out. She was a part of his ostracism. And he said irritably:

"Do you want a husband who would die if he missed the luncheon hour?"

Gyp held out her cheque-book. He read on the counterfoil: "Messrs. Travers & Sanborn, Tailors, Account rendered: £54.3.7."

Fiorsen turned the peculiar colour which denoted injury to his self-esteem.

"Did you pay it? You have no business to pay my bills."

"The man said if it wasn't paid this time, he'd sue you. I think owing money is undignified. Are there many others?"

"I shall not tell you."

"I have to keep this house and pay the maids, and I want to know how I stand. I am not going to make debts."

Her face had a hardness that he did not know. She was different from the Gyp of this hour yesterday—when, last in possession of his faculties, he had seen or spoken to her. This novel revolt stirred him in strange ways, wounded his self-conceit, inspired a curious fear, yet excited his senses. He said softly:

"Money! Curse money! Kiss me!"

"It's childish to curse money. I will spend all the income I have; but not more, and I will not ask Dad."

He flung himself down in a chair.

"Ho! Ho! Virtue!"

"No—pride."

He said gloomily:

"So you don't believe in me. You don't believe I can earn as much as I want—more than you have—any time? You never have believed in me."

"I think you earn now as much as you are ever likely to earn."

"Oh! you think that! Well! I don't want your money!"

"Hssh!"

He looked round. The maid stood in the doorway.

"Please, sir, the driver says can he have his fare, or do you want him again? Twelve shillings."

Fiorsen stared at her in the way that—as the maid often said—made you 'feel a silly.'

"No. Pay him."

The girl glanced at Gyp, answered: "Yes, sir," and went out.

Fiorsen laughed. It was droll coming on the top of his assertion.

"That was good, wasn't it, Gyp?"

But her face was unmoved; and, knowing that she was even more easily tickled by the incongruous than himself, he felt again that catch of fear. Something was different. Yes; something was really different.

"Did I hurt you last night?"

She shrugged her shoulders and went to the window. He looked at her darkly, and swung out past her into the garden. And, almost at once, the sound of his violin, furiously played in the music-room, came across the lawn.

Gyp listened with a bitter smile. Money, too! But what did it matter? She could not get out of what she had done. She could never get out. To-night he would kiss her; and she would pretend it was all right. And so it would go on and on! Well, it was her own fault. Taking twelve shillings from her purse, she put them aside on the bureau to give the maid. And suddenly she thought: 'Perhaps he'll get tired of me. If only he would get tired!' It was a long way the furthest she had yet gone.

VII

Those who know how, in the doldrums, the sails of the listless ship droop, and the hope of escape dies day by day, may understand something of the life she began living now. Even the doldrums come to an end. But a young woman of twenty-three, who has made a mistake in her marriage, and has only herself to blame, looks forward to no end, unless she be the new woman, which Gyp was not. Having settled that she would not admit failure, and clenched her teeth on the knowledge that she was going to have a child, she went on keeping things sealed up even from Winton. To Fiorsen, she managed to behave as usual, making material life easy and pleasant—playing for him, feeding him well, indulging his amorousness. To count herself a martyr would be silly! Her *malaise,* successfully concealed, was deeper—of the spirit; the subtle discouragement of one who has clipped her own wings.

As for Rosek, she treated him as if that little scene had never taken place. The idea of appealing to her husband in a difficulty was gone for ever since the night he came home drunk. And she did not dare to tell her father. But she was always on her guard, knowing that Rosek would not forgive her for that dart of ridicule. His insinuations about Daphne Wing she put out of mind, as she never could have if she had loved Fiorsen. She set up for herself the idol of pride, and became its faithful worshipper. Only Winton, and perhaps Betty, could tell she was not happy. Fiorsen's irresponsibility about money did not worry her overmuch, for she paid everything in the house—rent, wages, food, and her own dress—and had so far made ends meet; what he did outside the house she could not help.

The summer wore on till concerts were over, and it was supposed to be impossible to stay in London. But she dreaded going away. She wanted to stay on quietly in her little house. It was this which made her tell Fiorsen her secret one night. His cheeks, white and hollow from too much London, went a curious dull red; he got up and stared at her. Gyp made an involuntary movement.

"You needn't look at me. It's true."

He clasped his forehead and broke out:

"But I don't want it; I won't have it—spoiling my Gyp." Then quickly going up to her with a scared face: "I don't want it; I'm afraid of it. Don't have it."

In Gyp's heart came the same feeling as when he had stood there drunk, against the wall—compassion, rather than contempt of his childishness. And taking his hand, she said:

"All right, Gustav. It shan't bother you. When I begin to get ugly, I'll go away with Betty till it's over."

He went down on his knees.

"Oh, no! Oh, no! Oh, no! My beautiful Gyp!"

And Gyp sat like a sphinx, for fear that she too might let slip those words: "Oh, no!"

The windows were open, and moths had come in. One had settled on the hydrangea plant that filled the hearth. Gyp looked at the soft, white, downy thing, whose head was like a tiny owl's against the bluish petals; looked at the purple-grey tiles down there, and the stuff of her own frock, in the shaded gleam of the lamps. And all her love of beauty rebelled, called up by his: "Oh, no!" She would be unsightly soon, and suffer pain and perhaps die of it, as her own mother had died.

It interested her this night and next day to watch his treatment of the disconcerting piece of knowledge. For when at last he realised that he had to acquiesce in nature, he began to jib away from all reminder of it. She was careful not to suggest that he should go for a holiday without her. But when he was gone—to Ostend with Rosek—peace fell on Gyp. To be without that strange, disorderly presence in the house! And awakening in the sultry silence of the next morning, she utterly failed to persuade herself that she was missing him. Her heart was devoid of any emptiness or ache; she only felt how pleasant and cool and tranquil it was to lie there alone. She stayed quite late in bed. It was delicious, with window and door wide open and the puppies running in and out, to lie and doze off, or listen to the pigeon's cooing, and the distant sounds of traffic, and feel in command of herself once more, body and soul. Now that she had told Fiorsen, she had no longer any desire to keep her condition secret. She telephoned to her father that she was alone.

Winton had not gone away. Between Goodwood and Doncaster there was no racing he cared for; one could not ride at this time of year, so might just as well be in London. August was to him the pleasantest of all months in town; the club was empty, and he could sit there without some old bore button-

holing him. Little Boncarte, the fencing-master, was always free for a bout—Winton had long learned to make his left hand what his right hand used to be; the Turkish baths in Jermyn Street were nearly void of their fat clients; he could saunter over to Covent Garden, buy a melon, and carry it home without meeting any but the most inferior duchesses in Piccadilly; on warm nights he could stroll the streets or the parks, smoking his cigar, thinking vague thoughts, recalling vague memories. The news that his daughter was alone and free from that fellow was delightful. Where should he dine her? Mrs. Markey was on her holiday. Why not Blafard's? Quiet—small rooms—not too respectable—quite fairly cool. Blafard's!

When she drove up to Bury Street he was ready, feeling like a schoolboy off for an exeat. How pretty she was looking—though pale—her dark eyes, her smile! And stepping quickly to the cab, he said:

"No; I'm getting in—dining at Blafard's, Gyp—a night out!"

To walk into that little restaurant behind her; and passing through its low red rooms to mark the diners turn and stare with envy, was so pleasant. He settled her into a far corner by a window, where she could see and be seen. He wanted her to be seen; while he himself turned to the world the back wings of his greyish hair. He had no notion of being disturbed by the sight of Hivites and Amorites, lapping champagne and shining in the heat. For, secretly, he was living not only in this evening, but in an evening of the past, when, in this very corner, he had dined with her mother. *His* face then had borne the brunt; hers had been turned away from inquisition. But of this he did not speak to Gyp.

He took her news with the expression she knew so well—tightening his lips and staring a little upward.

"When?" he said.

"November."

The very month! Stretching his hand across the table, he took hers and pressed it tightly.

"It'll be all right, child; I'm glad."

Clinging to his hand, Gyp murmured:

"I'm not; but I won't be frightened—I promise."

Neither was deceived. But both were good at putting a calm face on things. Besides, this was "a night out"—the first since her marriage of freedom. After his, "So he's gone to Ostend?"

and his thought: 'He would!' they never alluded to Fiorsen, but talked of horses, of Mildenham—it seemed to Gyp years since she had been there—of her childish escapades. And, looking at him quizzically, she asked:

"What were you like as a boy, Dad? Aunt Rosamund says that you used to get into white rages, when nobody could go near you. She says you were always climbing trees, or shooting with a catapult, or stalking things, and that you never told anybody what you didn't want to tell them. And weren't you desperately in love with your nursery-governess?"

Winton smiled. Miss Huntley! with crinkly brown hair, and blue eyes, and fascinating frocks!

"Yes, yes. By Jove, what a time ago! And my father's going off to India. He never came back; killed in that first Afghan business. When I was fond, I *was* fond. But I didn't feel things like you—not half so sensitive; not a bit like you, Gyp."

And watching her unconscious eyes following the movements of the waiters, never staring, but taking in all that was going on, he thought: 'Prettiest creature in the world!'

"Well," he said, "what would you like to do now—drop into a theatre or music-hall?"

Gyp shook her head. It was too hot. Could they just drive, and then perhaps sit in the park? It had gone dark, and the air was not quite so exhausted—a little freshness of scent from the trees in the squares and parks mingled with the fumes of dung and petrol. Winton gave the same order he had given that long past evening: "Knightsbridge Gate." It had been a hansom then, and the night air had blown in their faces, instead of, as now in these taxis, down the back of one's neck. They left the cab and crossed the Row; passed the end of the Long Water, up among the trees. There, on two chairs covered by Winton's coat, they sat side by side. No dew was falling yet; the leaves hung unstirring in the warm, sweet-smelling air. Blotted against trees or on the grass were other couples darker than the darkness, very silent. From Winton's lips cigar smoke wreathed and curled. He was dreaming. A long ash fell. He raised his hand to brush it off. Her voice said softly in his ear:

"Isn't it delicious, and warm, and bloomy dark?"

Winton shivered.

"Very jolly! But my cigar's out, and I haven't a match."

Gyp's hand slipped through his arm.

"All these people in love, and so dark and whispery—it makes a sort of strangeness in the air. Don't you feel it?"

A puff of wind ruffled the leaves; the night, for a moment, seemed full of whispering; then the sound of a giggle jarred out.

Gyp rose.

"I feel the dew now, Dad. Can we walk on?"

The spell was over; the night again only a common London night; the park a space of parching grass and gravel; the people just clerks and shop-girls walking out.

VIII

Fiorsen's letters were documents. He missed her horribly; but he seemed to be enjoying himself uncommonly. He wanted money, but failed to tell her how he spent it. Out of a balance running low, she sent him remittances; this was her holiday, too, and she could afford to pay for it. She sought out a shop where she could sell jewelry, and forwarded him the proceeds. It would give her another week.

One night she went with Winton to the Octagon, where Daphne Wing was still performing. Remembering the girl's rapture in her garden, she wrote next day, asking her to lunch and spend a lazy afternoon.

Miss Daphne came with avidity; pale, and droopy from the heat, in Liberty silk, with a plain turned down straw hat. After lunch they settled in the deepest shade of the garden, Gyp in a wicker chair, Daphne Wing on cushions and the grass. Once past the exclamatory stage, she laid bare her little soul with liberality. And Gyp—excellent listener—enjoyed the revelation of an existence so different from her own.

"Of course I don't mean to stay at home any longer than I can help; only it's no good going out into life"—this phrase she often used—"till you know where you are. In my profession one has to be so careful. Of course, people think it's worse than it is; Father gets fits sometimes. But you know, Mrs. Fiorsen, home's awful. We have mutton—you know what mutton is—it's really awful in your bedroom in hot weather. And there's nowhere to practise. What I should like would be a studio. It would be lovely, somewhere down by the river, or up here near you. That *would* be lovely. You know, I'm putting by. As soon as ever I have two hundred pounds, I shall skip. What I think would be perfectly lovely would be to inspire painters and musicians. I don't want to be just a common 'turn'—ballet business year after year, and that; I want to be something rather special. But Mother's so silly about me; she thinks I oughtn't to take any risks at all. I shall never get on that way. It *is* so nice to talk to you, Mrs. Fiorsen, because you're young enough to know what I feel; and I'm sure you'd never be shocked at anything. You see, about men: Ought one to marry, or ought

one to take a lover? They say you can't be a perfect artist till you've felt passion. But, then, if you marry, that means mutton over again, and perhaps babies, and perhaps the wrong man after all. Ugh! But then, on the other hand, I don't want to be raffish. I hate raffish people—I simply hate them. What do you think? It's awfully difficult, isn't it?"

Gyp, perfectly grave, answered:

"That sort of thing settles itself. I shouldn't bother beforehand."

Daphne Wing buried her chin deeper in her hands.

"Yes; I rather thought that, too; of course I could do either now. But, you see, I really don't care for men who are not distinguished. I'm sure I shall only fall in love with a really distinguished man. That's what you did—isn't it?—so you *must* understand. I think Mr. Fiorsen is wonderfully distinguished."

Sunlight, piercing the shade, suddenly fell warm on Gyp's neck where her blouse ceased. She continued to look gravely at Daphne Wing.

"Of course, Mother would have fits if I asked her such a question, and I don't know what Father would do. Only it is important, isn't it? One may go all wrong from the start; and I do really want to get on. I simply adore my work. I don't mean to let love stand in its way; I want to make it help, you know. Count Rosek says my dancing lacks passion. I wish you'd tell me if you think it does. I should believe *you*."

Gyp shook her head.

"I'm not a judge."

Daphne Wing looked up reproachfully.

"Oh, I'm sure you are! If I were a man, I should be passionately in love with you. I've got a new dance where I'm supposed to be a nymph pursued by a faun; it's so difficult to feel like a nymph when you know it's only the ballet-master. Do you think I ought to put passion into that? You see, I'm supposed to be flying all the time; but it would be much more subtle, wouldn't it, if I could give the impression that I wanted to be caught? Don't you think so?"

Gyp said suddenly:

"Yes, I think it *would* do you good to be in love."

Miss Daphne's mouth fell a little open; her eyes grew round. She said:

"You frightened me when you said that. You looked so—so—intense."

A flame, indeed, had leaped up in Gyp. This fluffy, flabby talk of love set her instincts in revolt. She did not want to love; she had failed to fall in love. But, whatever love was like, it did not bear talking about. How was it that this suburban miss, when she once got on her toes, could twirl one's emotions as she did?

"D'you know what I should simply revel in?" Daphne Wing went on: "To dance to you here in the garden some night. It must be wonderful to dance out of doors; and the grass is nice and hard now. Only, I suppose it would shock the servants. Do they look out this way?" Gyp shook her head. "I could dance over there in front of the drawing-room window. Only it would have to be moonlight. I could come any Sunday. I've got a dance where I'm supposed to be a lotus flower—that would do splendidly. And there's my real moonlight dance that goes to Chopin. I could bring my dresses, and change in the music-room, couldn't I?" She sat up cross-legged, gazing at Gyp, and clasping her hands. "Oh, may I?"

A desire to give pleasure, the queerness of the notion, and her real love of seeing this girl dance, made Gyp say:

"All right; next Sunday."

Daphne Wing got up, made a rush, and kissed her. Her mouth was soft, and she smelled of orange blossom; but Gyp recoiled a little—she hated promiscuous kisses. Abashed, Miss Daphne hung her head, and said:

"You looked so lovely; I couldn't help it, really."

Gyp gave her hand a compunctious squeeze.

They went indoors, to try over the music for the two dances; and soon after Daphne Wing departed, full of sugar-plums and hope.

She arrived punctually at eight o'clock next Sunday, carrying a small green linen bag which contained her dresses. She was evidently a little scared. Lobster salad, hock, and peaches restored her courage. She ate heartily. It did not apparently matter to her whether she danced full or empty; but she would not smoke.

"It's bad for the—don't you know," she said.

After supper, Gyp shut the dogs into the back premises; having visions of their rending Miss Wing's draperies, or calves. Then they went into the drawing-room, not lighting up, so as

to tell when the moonlight was strong enough outside. This last night of August the heat was as great as ever—a deep, unstirring warmth; the climbing moon shot as yet but a thin shaft here and there through the heavy leafage. They talked in low voices, unconsciously playing up to the nature of the escapade. When the moon was high enough they stole out across the garden to the music-room. Gyp lighted the candles.

"Can you manage?"

Miss Daphne had already shed half her garments.

"Oh, I'm so excited, Mrs. Fiorsen! I do hope I shall dance well."

Gyp went back to the house and sat down at the piano, turning her eyes towards the garden. A blurred white shape flitted suddenly across the darkness at the far end and became motionless—like a white-flowering bush under the trees—waiting for the moon. Gyp began to play. She played a little Sicilian pastorale that the herdsmen play on their pipes coming down from the hills, from very far, rising, swelling to full cadence, and falling away again to nothing. The moon rose over the trees; its light flooded the face of the house, down on to the grass, and spread slowly, till it caught the border of sunflowers along the garden wall with a stroke of magical, unearthly colour—gold that was not gold.

Gyp began to play the dance. The pale blur in the darkness stirred. The moonlight fell on the girl now, standing with arms spread, holding out her drapery—a white, winged statue. Then, like a gigantic moth she fluttered forth, blanched and noiseless, flew over the grass, spun and hovered. The moonlight etched out the shape of her head, painted her hair a pallid gold. In the silence, with that unearthly gleam of colour along the sunflowers and on the girl's head, it was as if a spirit had dropped into the garden and was fluttering to and fro, unable to get out.

A voice behind Gyp said: "My God! What's this? An angel?"

Fiorsen was standing half-way in the darkened room, staring out into the garden. The girl stopped, her eyes round as saucers, her mouth open, her limbs rigid with interest and affright. Suddenly she turned, and, gathering her garment, fled, her limbs gleaming in the moonlight.

Gyp sat looking up at the apparition of her husband. She could just see his eyes straining after that flying nymph. Miss

Daphne's farm! Why, even his ears were pointed! Had she never noticed before how like a faun he was? Yes—on her wedding night! And she said quietly:

"Daphne Wing was rehearsing her new dance. So you're back! Why didn't you let me know? Are you all right—you look splendid!"

Fiorsen bent and kissed her.

But even while his lips were pressed on hers, she felt rather than saw his eyes straying to the garden, and thought, "He would like to be kissing that girl!"

While he went to get his things from the cab, she slipped out to the music-room.

Miss Daphne, fully dressed, was stuffing her garments into the green linen bag. She looked up.

"Oh! Does he mind? It's awful, isn't it?"

Gyp strangled her desire to laugh.

"It's for you to mind."

"Oh, *I* don't, if you don't! How did you like the dance?"

"Lovely! When you're ready—come along!"

"Oh, I think I'd rather go home, please! It must seem so funny!"

"Would you like to go by this back way into the lane? You turn to the right, into the road."

"Oh, yes; please. It would have been better if he could have seen the dance properly, wouldn't it? What will he think?"

Gyp smiled, and opened the door into the lane.

When she returned, Fiorsen was at the window, gazing out. Was it for her or for the flying nymph?

IX

September and October passed. There were more concerts, not very well attended. Fiorsen's novelty had worn off, nor had his playing enough sweetness and sentiment for the big Public. A financial crisis had developed, but it seemed remote and unreal in the shadow of her coming time. She made no garments, no preparations of any kind. Why make what might never be needed? She played for Fiorsen a great deal, for herself not at all, read many books—poetry, novels, biographies—taking them in at the moment and forgetting them at once. Winton and Aunt Rosamund, by tacit agreement, came on alternate afternoons. And Winton would take the evening train after leaving her, to go racing or cub-hunting, returning the morning of the day after to pay his next visit. He had no dread just then like that of an unoccupied day face to face with anxiety.

Betty, who had been present at Gyp's birth, was in a queer state. The obvious desirability of such events to one of a motherly type, defrauded by fate of children, was terribly impinged on by that old memory, and a solicitude for her "pretty" far exceeding what she would have had for a daughter of her own. What a peony regards as a natural happening to a peony, she watches with awe when it happens to the lily. That other single lady of a certain age, Aunt Rosamund, the very antithesis to Betty—a long, thin nose and a mere button, a sense of divine rights and no sense of rights at all, a drawl and a comforting wheeze, length and circumference, decision and the curtsey to providence, humour and none, dyspepsia, and the digestion of an ostrich, with other appositions—Aunt Rosamund was also uneasy, as only one could be who disapproved of uneasiness, and habitually joked it into retirement.

But of all those around Gyp, Fiorsen gave the most interesting display. He had not even an elementary notion of disguising his state of mind. And his state of mind was primitive. He wanted Gyp as she had been. The thought that she might never become herself again forced him to drink brandy, and come home only a little less far gone than that first time. Gyp had often to help him go to bed. On two or three occasions, he suffered so that he was out all night. To account for this, she

devised the formula of a room at Count Rosek's, where he slept when music kept him late, so as not to disturb her. Whether the servants believed her or not, she never knew. Nor did she ever ask him where he went—too proud, and not feeling that she had the right.

Conscious of the unæsthetic nature of her condition, she felt she could no longer be attractive to one so easily upset in his nerves, so intolerant of ugliness. As to deeper feelings about her—had he any? He certainly never gave anything up, or sacrificed himself in any way. If she had loved, she herself would want to give up everything to the loved one; but then—she would never love! And yet he seemed frightened about her. It was puzzling! But perhaps she would not be puzzled much longer about that or anything; for she often had the feeling that she would die; and, at times, felt that she would be glad to die. Life had defrauded her, or, rather, she had defrauded herself of life. Was it really only a year since that glorious day's hunting when Dad and she, and the young man with the irrepressible smile, had slipped away ahead of all the field—the fatal day Fiorsen descended from the clouds and asked for her? A longing for Mildenham came on her, to get away there with her father and Betty.

She went at the beginning of November.

Over her departure Fiorsen behaved like a tired child that will not go to bed. He could not bear to be away from her; but when she had gone, he spent a furious Bohemian evening. At about five, he woke with "an awful cold feeling in my heart," as he wrote to Gyp next day—"an awful feeling, my Gyp; I walked up and down for hours" (in reality, half an hour at most). "How shall I bear to be away from you at this time? I feel lost." Next day he found himself in Paris with Rosek. "I could not stand," he wrote, "the sight of the streets, of the garden, of our room. When I come back I shall stay with Rosek. Nearer to the day I will come; I must come to you." But Gyp, when she read the letter, said to Winton: "Dad, when it comes, don't send for him. I don't want him here."

Those letters of his destroyed the last remnant of her feeling that somewhere in him must be something fine and beautiful like the sounds he made with his violin. And yet she felt those letters genuine in a way, pathetic, and with real feeling of a sort.

At Mildenham she began to lose hopelessness about herself;

had the sensation of wanting to live in the new life within her. She first felt it going into her old nursery, where everything was as it had been when she was a child of eight; her old red doll's house, the side of which opened to display the various floors; the worn Venetian blinds, the rattle of whose fall had sounded in her ears so many hundred times; the high fender, near which she had lain so often on the floor, chin on hands, reading Grimm, or "Alice in Wonderland," or histories of England. Here, too, this new child would live among the old familiars. And the whim seized her to face her hour in the old nursery, not the room where she had slept as a girl. In the nursery—there was safety, comfort! And when she had been at Mildenham a week, she made Betty change her over.

No one in that house was half so calm as Gyp. Betty was not guiltless of crying at odd moments. Mrs. Markey had never made such bad soups. Markey forgot himself in talk. Winton was like an unquiet spirit. His voice, so measured and dry, too plainly disclosed the anxiety in his heart. Gyp felt it wonderful that they should all care so much! She would sit staring into the fire with her wide, dark eyes, unblinking as an owl's at night—wondering how she could make up to her father, whom already she had nearly killed by coming into life at all.

X

From the day of the nurse's arrival, Winton gave up hunting. He was never away from the house for more than half an hour at a time. Distrust of doctors did not prevent him having ten minutes every morning with the old practitioner who had treated Gyp for mumps, measles, and the other ills of childhood. Old Rivershaw was a peculiar survival. He smelled of mackintosh, had purplish cheeks, a rim of dyed hair, and bulging grey blood-shot eyes. He was short in body and wind, drank port-wine, took snuff, read *The Times,* spoke in a husky voice, and used a very small brougham with a very old black horse. But he had a certain low cunning, which had defeated many ailments, and his reputation for assisting people into the world stood high. Every morning punctually at twelve, the crunch of his brougham's wheels would be heard. Winton would get up, and take out a decanter of port, a biscuit canister, and a glass. When the doctor appeared, he would say:

"Well, doctor? How is she?"

"Nicely; quite nicely."

"Nothing to make one anxious?"

With eyes straying to the decanter, the doctor would murmur:

"Cardiac condition, capital—a little—um—not to matter. Taking its course. These things!"

"Glass of port, doctor?"

An expression of surprise would pass over the doctor's face.

"Cold day—ah, perhaps——" And he would blow his nose on his purple-and-red bandanna.

Watching him drink his port, Winton would remark:

"We can get you at any time, can't we?"

"Never fear, my dear sir! Little Miss Gyp—old friend of mine. At her service day and night. Never fear!"

A sensation of comfort would pass through Winton, which would last quite twenty minutes after the crunching of the wheels and the mingled perfumes had died away.

By Gyp's request, they kept from him knowledge of when her pains began. After the first bout, when she was lying half asleep in the old nursery, he happened to go up. The nurse—a bonny creature—met him in the sitting-room. Accustomed to

the "fuss and botheration of men" at such times, she was prepared to deliver a lecture. But, affected by the look on his face, she simply whispered:

"It's beginning; don't be anxious—she's not suffering just now. We shall send for the doctor soon. She's very plucky"; and with an unaccustomed sensation of respect and pity, she repeated: "Don't be anxious, sir."

"If she wants to see me at any time, I shall be in my study. Save her all you can, nurse."

The nurse returned pensive to Gyp, who said:

"Was that my father? I didn't want him to know."

"That's all right, my dear."

"How long do you think before it'll begin again, nurse? I'd like to see him."

The nurse stroked her hair.

"Soon enough when it's all over and comfy. Men are always fidgety."

Gyp looked at her, and said quietly:

"You see, my mother died when I was born."

The nurse smoothed the bed-clothes.

"That's nothing—that is, I mean—it has no connection whatever."

And seeing Gyp smile, she thought: 'Well, I am a fool.'

"If by any chance I don't get through, I want to be cremated. Will you remember, nurse? I can't tell my father that just now; it might upset him."

And the nurse thought: 'That can't be done without a will or something, but I'd better promise. It's a morbid fancy, and yet she's not a morbid subject, either.' And she said:

"Very well, my dear; only, you're not going to do anything of the sort."

"I'm awfully ashamed, wanting all this attention, and making people miserable."

The nurse, still busy with the bed-clothes, murmured:

"Don't you fancy you're half the trouble most of them are. You're going to get on splendidly." And she thought: 'Odd! She's never once spoken of her husband. I don't like it for this sort—too sensitive; her face touches you.'

Gyp murmured:

"I'd like to see my father, please; and rather quick."

The nurse, after a swift look, went out.

Gyp had clenched her hands under the bed-clothes. Novem-

ber! Acorns and the leaves—a nice, damp, earthy smell! Acorns all over the grass. She used to drive the old retriever in harness on the lawn covered with acorns and the dead leaves, and the wind still blowing them off the trees—in her brown velvet dress! Who was it had called her once "a wise little owl," in that dress? And her heart sank—the pain was coming again. Winton's voice from the door said:

"Well, my pet?"

"It was only to see how you are. I'm all right."

Her forehead was wet to his lips.

Outside, in the passage, her smile, like something actual on the air, preceded him—the smile that had just lasted out. But when he was back in the study, he suffered. Why could he not have that pain to bear instead?

The crunch of the brougham brought his march over the carpet to an end. He went out into the hall and looked into the doctor's face—he had forgotten that this old fellow knew nothing of his special reason for deadly fear. Then he turned back into his study. A wild south-west wind was whirling wet drift-leaves against the panes. It was here that he had stood looking out into the dark, when Fiorsen came down to ask for Gyp a year ago. Why had he not bundled the fellow out neck and crop, and taken her away?—India, Japan—anywhere! She had not loved that fiddler, never really loved him. Monstrous! Full bitterness swept over Winton, and he groaned aloud. He went over to the bookcase; there were the few books he ever read, and he took one out. "Life of General Lee." He put it back and took another, a novel of Whyte-Melville's: "Good for Nothing." Sad book—sad ending! It dropped from his hand with a flump on to the floor. In icy discovery, he had seen his life as it would be if for a second time he had to bear such loss. She must not die! If she did—then, for him——! In old times they buried a man with his horse and his dog, as if at the end of a good run. There was always that! The extremity of this thought brought relief. He sat down, and, for a long time, stayed staring into the fire in a sort of coma. Then his feverish fears began again. Why the devil didn't they come and tell him something, anything—rather than this silence, this deadly waiting? The front door shutting? Wheels? At the door stood Markey, holding in his hand some cards.

"Lady Summerhay; Mr. Bryan Summerhay. I said 'Not at home,' sir."

Winton nodded.

"You have had no lunch, sir."

"What time is it?"

"Four o'clock."

"Bring in my fur coat and the port, and make the fire up. I want any news there is."

Markey nodded.

Odd to sit in a fur coat before a fire, and the day not cold! They said you lived on after death. He had never been able to feel that *she* was living on. *She* lived in Gyp. And now if Gyp——! He got up and drew the curtains.

It was seven o'clock when the doctor came down. Winton was still sitting before the fire, motionless, shrunk into his fur coat. He raised himself a little and looked round.

The doctor puckered his face, drooping his eyelids half-way across his bulging eyes; it was his way of smiling. "Nicely," he said; "nicely—a girl. No complications."

Winton's lips opened, he raised his hand. Then, the habit of a lifetime inhibiting, he stayed motionless.

"Glass of port, doctor?"

Above the glass the doctor seemed to muse: 'H'm! "the fifty-two." Give me "the sixty-eight"—more body.'

After a time, Winton went up. In the outer room he had a return of his cold dread. "Perfectly successful—the patient died from exhaustion!" A tiny squawking noise failed to reassure him. He cared nothing for that new being. Suddenly he found Betty just behind him.

"What is it, woman? Don't!"

She was sobbing, and gurgling:

"She looks so lovely—oh dear, she looks so lovely!"

Pushing her abruptly aside, Winton peered in through the just-opened door. Gyp was lying still and white; her eyes, very dark, were fastened on her baby. Her face wore a kind of wonder. She did not see Winton, who stood stone-quiet, watching, while the nurse moved about her business behind a screen. This was the first time in his life that he had seen a mother with her just-born baby. The look on her face—gone right away—amazed him. She had never seemed to like children, had said she did not want a child. He went in. She made a faint motion toward the baby, and her eyes smiled. Winton looked at that swaddled speckled mite: then, bending down, kissed her hand and tiptoed away.

At dinner he drank champagne, benevolent towards all the world. Watching the smoke of his cigar, he thought: 'Must send that chap a wire.' After all, he was a fellow-being—might be suffering, as he himself had suffered only two hours ago. To keep him in ignorance——! And, writing:

"All well, a daughter.—WINTON," sent it out with the order that a groom should take it in that night.

Gyp was sleeping when he stole up at ten o'clock.

XI

Returning the next afternoon from the first ride for several days, Winton passed the station fly rolling away from the drive-gate with the light-hearted disillusionment of a quite empty vehicle.

The sight of a fur coat and broad-brimmed hat in the hall warned him of what had happened.

"Mr. Fiorsen, sir; gone up to Mrs. Fiorsen."

"Did he bring things?"

"A bag, sir."

"Get a room ready, then."

To dine *tête-à-tête* with that fellow!

Gyp had passed the strangest morning in her life, so far. The tug of her baby's lips gave her the queerest sensation; a sort of meltedness, an infinite warmth, a desire to grip the little creature right into her. Yet, neither her sense of humour nor her sense of beauty was deceived. It was a queer little creature, with a tuft of black hair, and in grace greatly inferior to a kitten. Its tiny, pink, crisped fingers with infinitesimal nails, its microscopic curly toes, and solemn black eyes—when they showed, its inimitable stillness when it slept, its incredible vigour when it fed, were all, as it were, miraculous. Withal, she had a feeling of gratitude to one who had not killed nor even hurt her so very desperately—gratitude because she had succeeded, performed her part of mother perfectly—the nurse had said so—she, so distrustful of herself! Instinctively she knew, too, that this was *her* baby, not his, going "to take after her," as they called it. How it succeeded in giving that impression she could not tell, unless by its passivity, and dark eyes. From one till three they had slept together with perfect soundness and unanimity. She awoke to find the nurse standing by the bed, looking as if she wanted to tell her something.

"Someone to see you, my dear."

Gyp thought: 'He! I don't know—I don't know.' Her face expressed this, for the nurse said at once:

"Are you quite up to it?"

"Yes. Only, not for five minutes, please."

Her spirit had been very far away, she wanted time before

she saw him—to know in some sort what she felt now; what this mite lying beside her had done for her and him. It was his, too—this tiny, helpless being. No, it was not his! He had not wanted it, and now that she had been through the torture, it was hers, not his—never his. Then came the old accusing thought: 'But I married him—I chose to marry him. I can't get out of that!' And she felt as if she must cry out to the nurse: 'Keep him away; I don't want to see him.' She forced the words back, and said:

"Now, I'm ready."

She noticed his clothes first—a dark grey suit, with little lighter lines—she had chosen it herself; his tie was in a bow, not a sailor's knot, his hair brighter than usual—as always just after being cut; and surely the hair was growing down again in front of his ears. Then, almost with emotion, she realised that his whole face was quivering. He came in on tiptoe, crossed very swiftly to the bed, very swiftly knelt down, and, taking her hand, turned it over and put his face to it. The bristles of his moustache tickled her palm; his nose flattened itself against her fingers, and his lips kept murmuring words into the hand, with the moist warm touch of his lips. Gyp knew he was burying there all his remorse, the excesses, perhaps, he had committed while she had been away from him, burying the fears he had felt, and the emotion at seeing her so white and still. In a minute he would raise a quite different face. 'Why don't I love him?' she thought. 'There's something lovable. Why don't I?'

His eyes lighted on the baby; he was grinning.

"Oh, my Gyp, what a funny one! Oh, oh, oh!" His face slowly puckered into comic disgust. Gyp too had seen the humours of her baby, its little reddish pudge of a face, its twenty-seven black hairs, the dribble at its almost invisible mouth; but she had also seen it as a miracle; and there surged up in her all the old revolt against his lack of consideration. It was not funny—her baby—not ugly! Or, if so, she was not fit to be told of it. Fiorsen put his finger out and touched its cheek.

"It *is* real—so it is. Mademoiselle Fiorsen. Tk, tk!"

The baby stirred. And Gyp thought: 'If I loved him, I wouldn't mind his laughing at my baby. It would be different.'

"Don't wake her!" she whispered, felt his eyes on her, and knew that his interest in the baby had ceased and he was thinking, 'How long before I have you in my arms again?' And, suddenly, she had a sinking sensation that she had never yet

known. When she opened her eyes again, the nurse was holding something beneath her nose and muttering: "Well, I am a d——d fool!" Fiorsen was gone.

Seeing Gyp's eyes once more open, the nurse withdrew the ammonia, replaced the baby, and saying: "Now go to sleep!" withdrew behind the screen. Like all robust personalities, she visited on others her vexations with herself. But Gyp did not sleep; she gazed at her sleeping baby, and at the pattern of the wall-paper, trying mechanically to find the bird caught at intervals amongst its brown-and-green foliage—one bird in each alternate square of the pattern, so that there was always a bird in the centre of four other birds. And the bird was of green and yellow with a red beak.

On being turned out of the nursery with the assurance that it was "only a little faint," Fiorsen went downstairs disconsolate. This dark house where he was an unwelcome stranger was insupportable. He wanted nothing in it but Gyp, and Gyp had fainted at his touch. He opened a door. A piano! The drawing-room. Ugh! No fire—what misery! He recoiled to the doorway and stood listening. Not a sound. Grey light in the cheerless room; dark already in the hall behind him. What a life these English lived—worse than the winter in his old country home in Sweden, where, at all events, they kept good fires. And, suddenly, he revolted. Stay here and face that father! Stay here for a night of this! Gyp was not his Gyp, lying there with that baby beside her, in this hostile house. Smothering his footsteps, he made for the outer hall. There were his coat and hat. He put them on. His bag? He could not see it. No matter! They could send it after him. He would write—say that her fainting had upset him—that he could not risk making her faint again, nor stay in the house so near her, yet so far. She would understand. And there came over him a sudden wave of longing. Gyp! He wanted her. To look at her and kiss her, and feel her his own again! And, opening the door, he passed out on to the drive and strode away, very miserable and sick at heart. All the way to the station through the darkening lanes, and in the railway carriage going up, he felt that aching wretchedness. Only in the lighted street, driving back to Rosek's, did he shake it off a little. At dinner and after, he nearly lost it; but it came back again, till sleep relieved him with its darkness and dreams.

XII

Gyp's recovery proceeded at first with a sure rapidity which delighted Winton. As the nurse said: She was beautifully made, and that had a lot to do with it!

Before Christmas Day, she was already out, and on Christmas morning the old doctor, by way of present, pronounced her fit to go home when she liked. That afternoon, she was not so well, and next day back again upstairs. Nothing seemed definitely wrong with her save a desperate lassitude; as if the knowledge that to go back only needed her decision, had been too much for her. And, since no one knew her inward feelings, all were puzzled except Winton. The nursing of her child was promptly stopped.

Not till the middle of January did she say to him:

"I must go home, Dad."

The word "home" hurt, and he only answered:

"Very well, Gyp; when?"

"The house is quite ready. I think I had better go to-morrow. He's still at Rosek's. I won't let him know. Two or three days there by myself first would be better for settling baby in."

"Very well; I'll take you up."

He made no effort to ascertain her feelings towards Fiorsen. He knew them too well.

They travelled next day, reaching London at half-past two. The installation of Betty and the baby in the spare room that was now to be the nursery, absorbed all her first energies. Light was just beginning to fail when, still in her fur, she took a key of the music-room and crossed the garden, to see how all had fared during her ten weeks' absence. What a wintry garden! How different from that languorous, warm, moonlit night when Daphne Wing had come dancing out of the shadow of the dark trees. Bare and sharp the boughs against the grey, darkening sky—not a song of any bird, not a flower! She glanced back at the house. It looked cold and white, but there were lights in her room and in the nursery, and someone just drawing the curtains. The leaves were off, she could see the other houses of

the road, each different in shape and colour, as is the habit of London houses. It was cold, frosty; she hurried down the path. Four little icicles had formed beneath the window of the music-room, and she broke one off. There must be a fire in there, she could see the flicker through the curtains not quite drawn. Thoughtful Ellen had been airing it! And, suddenly, she stood still. Through the chink in the drawn curtains she had seen two figures seated on the divan. Something spun round in her head. Then, with a kind of deadly coolness, she deliberately looked in. He and Daphne Wing! His arm was round the girl's neck, her face turned back and up, gazing at him, the lips parted, the eyes hypnotized, adoring.

Gyp raised her hand. For a second it hovered close to the glass. With a sick feeling, she dropped it and turned away.

Never would she show him or that girl that they could hurt her! They were safe from any scene she would make—safe in their nest! And, across the frosty grass, through the unlighted drawing-room, she went upstairs, locked her door, and sat down before the fire. Pride raged within her. She stuffed her handkerchief between her teeth and lips, unconsciously. Her eyes felt scorched from the fire-flames, but she did not trouble to hold her hand before them.

Suppose she had loved him! The handkerchief dropped; she looked at it with wonder—blood-stained. Away from the scorching of the fire, she sat quite still, a smile on her lips. That girl's eyes, like a little adoring dog's—that girl, who had fawned on her so! She had got her "distinguished man"! She sprang up and looked at herself in the glass. In her own house! Why not here—in this room? Why not before her eyes? Not yet a year married! It was almost funny—almost funny! And she had her first calm thought: 'I am free.'

But it did not seem to mean anything to a spirit so stricken in its pride. She moved closer to the fire again. Why had she not tapped on the window? To have seen that girl's face ashy with fright! To have seen him—caught—in the room she had made beautiful for him, where she had played for him so many hours! How long had they used it for their meetings—sneaking in by that door from the back lane? Perhaps even before she went away—to bear his child! And there began in her a struggle between mother instinct and the sense of outrage—a dumb tug-of-war—would she feel her baby all hers now, or would

it have slipped away from her heart, and be a thing almost abhorrent?

She huddled nearer the fire, cold and physically sick, with the thought: 'If I don't let the servants know I'm here, they might go out and see what I saw!' Had she shut the drawing-room window when she returned? She rang the bell and unlocked the door. The maid came up.

"Please shut the drawing-room window, Ellen; and tell Betty I'm afraid I got a little chill travelling. I'm going to bed. Ask her if she can manage with baby." The girl's face wore an expression of concern, even of commiseration, but not that fluttered look which must have been there if she had known.

"Yes, m'm; I'll get you a hot-water bottle, m'm. Would you like a hot bath and a cup of hot tea at once?"

Gyp nodded. Anything! And when the maid was gone, she thought: 'A cup of hot tea! What should it be but hot?'

The maid came back with the tea; she was an affectionate girl, who admired Gyp, and was her partisan in a household which lacked unity. The mistress was much too good for him—a foreigner—and such 'abits! Manners—he hadn't any! And no good would come of it. Not if you took her opinion!

"I've turned the water in, m'm. Will you have a little mustard in it?"

And, going downstairs for the mustard, she told cook: "There's that about the mistress that makes you quite pathetic." The cook, fingering her concertina, for which she had a passion, answered:

"She 'ides up her feelin's. Thank 'eaven she haven't got that drawl that 'er old aunt 'as—always makes me feel to want to say, 'Buck up, old dear, you ain't 'alf that precious.'"

And, drawing out her concertina to its full length, with cautionary softness she began to practise, "Home, Sweet Home!"

To Gyp, lying in her hot bath, those muffled strains mounted, like the far-away humming of large flies. The heat of the water, the pungent smell of the mustard, and that droning hum slowly soothed and drowsed away the vehemence of feeling. Some day she, too, would love! Strange that she should feel that at such a moment! Yes; some day love would come to her. And there floated before her the adoring look on Daphne Wing's face, the shiver that had passed along her arm. Pity crept into her heart—half-bitter, half-admiring. Why should she grudge—she who did not love? The sound, like the humming of large flies, grew

deeper, more vibrating. Cook in her passion was swelling out her music on the phrase,

"Be it ne-e-ver so humble,
There's no-o place like home!"

XIII

That night Gyp slept as though nothing had happened and there were no future at all before her. She woke into misery. Her pride would force her to keep an unmoved face and live an unmoved life; but the struggle between mother-instinct and revolt was still going on. She was afraid to see her baby.

She got up at noon and stole downstairs. She had not realised quite how violent was her struggle over *his* child till she was passing the door of the room where it was lying. If she had not been ordered to give up nursing, that struggle would never have come. Her heart ached, but a demon drove her past the door. Downstairs she pottered round, dusting her china, putting in order the books which, after house-cleaning, the maid had arranged almost too carefully, so that the first volumes of Dickens and Thackeray followed each other on the top shelf, and the second volumes followed each other on the bottom shelf. And all the time she thought: 'What do I care how the place looks? It is not my home. It can never be my home!'

For lunch she drank beef tea, keeping up the fiction of indisposition. After that, she sat down to write. Something must be decided! But nothing came—not one word—not even the way to address him. The maid brought a note from Aunt Rosamund, and the dogs, who fell frantically on their mistress and began to fight for her possession. She went on her knees to separate them, and their avid tongues furiously licked her cheeks. At those kisses the band round her heart gave way; she was overwhelmed with longing for her baby. And, followed by the dogs, she went upstairs.

Gyp wrote a postcard that evening:

"We are back."

He would not get it till he woke about eleven; and with the instinct to take all the respite she could, she wandered about all day shopping and trying not to think. Returning at tea-time, she went straight up to her baby. He had come, and gone out with his violin to the music-room.

Gyp needed all her self-control. Soon the girl would come fluttering down that dark, narrow lane; perhaps at this very minute her fingers were tapping at the door, and he was opening

it to murmur: "No; she's back!" Ah, then the girl would shrink! The rapid whispering—some other meeting-place! Lips to lips, and that look on the girl's face; till she hurried away from the shut door, in the darkness, disappointed! And he, on that silver-and-gold divan, gnawing his moustache, his eyes—catlike—staring at the fire! And then, perhaps, from his violin would come one of those swaying bursts of sound, with tears in them, and the wind in them, that had of old bewitched her!

"Open the window just a little, Betty dear—it's hot."

Music—rising, falling! Why did it so move one even when it was the voice of insult! And she thought: 'He will expect me to go out there again and play for him. But I will not, never!'

She went into her bedroom, changed hastily into a teagown, and went down. A little china shepherdess on the mantelshelf attracted her attention. She had bought it three and more years ago, when she first came to London and life seemed just a long cotillion, with herself for leader. It seemed now the cool and dainty symbol of another world, without depths or shadows —not a happy world!

She had not long to wait before he tapped on the drawing-room window. Why did faces gazing in through glass from darkness always look hungry—searching, appealing for what you had and they had not? And while undoing the latch she thought: 'What am I going to say?' The ardour of his gaze, voice, hands, seemed to her comic; even more comically false his look of disappointment when she said:

"Please take care; I'm still brittle. Have you had a good time at Count Rosek's?" And, without her will, the words slipped out: "I'm afraid you've missed the music-room!"

His stare wavered; he began to walk up and down.

"Missed! Missed everything! I have been very miserable. Gyp. You've no idea how miserable. Yes, miserable, miserable!" With each repetition of the word his voice grew gayer. And kneeling down, he stretched his long arms round her: "Ah, my Gyp! I shall be a different being, now."

Gyp went on smiling. Between that, and stabbing these false raptures to the heart, there seemed nothing she could do. The moment his hands relaxed, she got up and said:

"You know there's a baby in the house?"

"Ah, the baby! I'd forgotten. Let's go up and see it."

Gyp answered:

"You go."

She could feel him thinking: 'Perhaps it will make her nice to me!' He turned suddenly and went.

She stood with eyes shut, seeing the divan in the music-room and the girl's arm shivering. Then, going to the piano, she began to play a polonaise.

That evening they dined out, and went to "The Tales of Hoffmann." By such devices it was possible to put off a little longer what she was going to do. During the drive home in the dark cab, she shrank away into her corner, pretending that his arm would hurt her dress. Twice she was on the point of crying out: "I am not Daphne Wing!" But each time pride strangled the words. And yet what other reason could she find to keep him from her room?

But when in her mirror she saw him standing behind her—he had crept into the bedroom like a cat—the blood rushed up in her face, and she said:

"No, Gustav, go out to the music-room if you want a companion."

He recoiled against the foot of the bed and stared at her; and Gyp, before her mirror, went on quietly taking the pins out of her hair. She could see him moving his head and hands as though in pain. Then, to her surprise, he went. And a vague compunction confused her sense of deliverance. She lay awake a long time, watching the fire-glow brighten and darken on the ceiling, while tunes from "The Tales of Hoffmann" ran in her head, and thoughts and fancies criss-crossed in her excited brain. Falling asleep at last, she dreamed she was feeding doves, and one of them was Daphne Wing. She woke with a start. By the firelight she saw him crouching at the foot of the bed, as on their wedding night—the same hungry yearning in his face, and an arm outstretched. Before she could speak, he began:

"Oh, Gyp, you don't understand! All that is nothing—it is only you I want. I am a fool who cannot control himself. Think! It's a long time since you went away from me."

Gyp said, in a hard voice:

"I didn't want to have a child."

"No; but now you have it, you are glad. Don't be unmerciful, my Gyp! It is like you to be merciful. That girl—it is all over—I swear—I promise."

Gyp thought: 'Why does he come and whine to me like this? He has no dignity—none!'

"How can you promise? You have made the girl love you. I saw her face."

"You saw her?"

"Yes."

"She is a little fool. I do not care for the whole of her as much as I care for your one finger. What does it matter if one does not care? The soul, not the body, is faithful."

Gyp said:

"It matters when it makes others miserable."

"Has it made you miserable, my Gyp?"

His voice had a ring of hope. She answered, startled:

"I? No—her."

"Her? It is experience—it is life. It will do her no harm."

"No; nothing will do anybody harm if it gives you pleasure."

At that bitter retort, he kept silence a long time, now and then heaving a long sigh. 'The soul, not the body, is faithful!' Was he, after all, more faithful to her than she had ever been, could ever be—who did not love, had never loved him? What right had she to talk, who had married him out of vanity, out of —what?

And suddenly he said:

"Gyp! Forgive!"

She sighed, and turned away her face.

He bent down against the eiderdown. She could hear him drawing long, sobbing breaths, and in the midst of her lassitude and hopelessness, a sort of pity stirred her. What did it matter? She said, in a choked voice:

"Very well, I forgive."

XIV

Gyp never really believed that Daphne Wing was of the past. Her sceptical instinct told her that what Fiorsen might honestly mean to do was very different from what he would do under stress of opportunity carefully put within his reach.

Since her return, Rosek had begun to come again, careful not to repeat his mistake, but not deceiving her at all. Though his self-control was as great as Fiorsen's was small, she felt he had not given up his pursuit of her, and would take very good care that Daphne Wing was afforded every chance of being with her husband. But pride never let her allude to the girl. Besides, what good to speak of her? They would both lie—Rosek, because he obviously saw the mistaken line of his first attack; Fiorsen, because his temperament did not permit him to suffer by speaking the truth.

Having set herself to endure, she lived in the moment, never thinking of the future, never thinking much of anything. She gave herself up to her baby. In watching, and feeling it warm against her, she succeeded in reaching the hypnotic state of mothers. But the baby slept a great deal, and much of its time was claimed by Betty. Those hours were difficult. If she read, she began at once to brood. She was cut off from the music-room, had not crossed its threshold since her discovery. Aunt Rosamund's efforts to take her into society were fruitless, and, though her father came, he never stayed long for fear of meeting Fiorsen. In this condition of affairs, she turned more and more to her own music, and one morning, having unearthed some compositions of her girlhood, she made a resolution. That afternoon she sallied forth into the February frost.

Monsieur Edouard Harmost inhabited the ground floor of a house in the Marylebone Road. He received his pupils in a large back room overlooking a little sooty garden. A Walloon by extraction, and of great vitality, he grew old with difficulty, preserving a soft corner in his heart for women, and a passion for novelty, even for new music.

When Gyp was shown into this well-remembered room, he was seated, with his yellow fingers buried in his stiff grey hair. He stared hard at Gyp.

"Aha!" he said, "my little friend! She has come back!" And, making for the mantelpiece, he took therefrom a bunch of Parma violets, brought by his last pupil, and thrust them under her nose. "Take them, take them. How much have you forgotten? Come!" And, seizing her by the elbow, he almost forced her to the piano. "Take off your furs. Sit down!"

And while Gyp was taking off her coat, he fixed on her his prominent brown eyes from under their squared eyelids and cliffs of brow. She had on what Fiorsen called her "humming-bird" blouse—dark blue, shot with peacock and old rose, and looked very warm and soft. Monsieur Harmost's stare seemed to drink her in, with the rather sad yearning of old men who love beauty and know that their time for seeing it is getting short.

"Play me the 'Carnival,'" he said. "We shall soon see!"

Gyp played. He nodded; tapped his fingers on his teeth, showed the whites of his eyes—which meant: "That will have to be very different!" And once he grunted. When she had finished, he sat down beside her, took her hand in his, and, examining the fingers, began:

"Yes, yes! Spoiling yourself, playing for that fiddler! *Trop sympathique!* The backbone, the backbone—we shall improve that. Four hours a day for six weeks—and we shall have something again."

"I have a baby, Monsieur Harmost."

"What! That is a tragedy!" Gyp shook her head. "You like it? A baby! Does it not squall?"

"Very little."

"*Mon Dieu!* Well, you are still beautiful. That is something. Now, what can you do with this baby? Could you get rid of it a little? This is a talent in danger. A fiddler, and a baby! *C'est beaucoup! C'est trop!*"

Gyp smiled. And Monsieur Harmost, whose exterior covered much sensibility, stroked her hand.

"You have grown up, my little friend," he said gravely. "Never mind; nothing is wasted. But a baby! Well; courage! We shall do things yet!"

Gyp turned her head away to hide the quivering of her lips. The scent of latakia tobacco which had soaked into things, of old books and music, a dark smell, like Monsieur Harmost's complexion; the old brown curtains, the sooty little back garden beyond, with its cat-runs, and its one stunted sumach tree; the

dark-brown stare of Monsieur Harmost's rolling eyes—all brought back that time of happiness, when she used to come week after week, full of gaiety and importance, and chatter away, basking in his brusque admiration and in music, with the glamourous feeling that she was making him happy, and herself happy, and going to play finely some day.

The voice of Monsieur Harmost boomed on, soft and gruff.

"Come, come! The only thing we cannot cure is age. You were right to come, my child. If things are not all they ought to be, you shall soon forget. In music—in music, we can get away. After all, my little friend, they cannot take our dreams from us—not even a wife, not even a husband can do that. We shall have good times yet!"

From those who serve art devoutly radiates a kind of glamour. She left Monsieur Harmost that afternoon infected by his passion for music. Poetic justice—on which all homeopathy is founded—would try and cure her life by a dose of what had spoiled it. To music she now gave all the hours she could spare. She went to him twice a week, though uneasy at the expense, for monetary conditions were ever more embarrassed. At home, she practised steadily and worked hard at composition. She finished several songs and studies during the spring and summer, and left still more unfinished. Monsieur Harmost was tolerant, seeming to know that harsh criticism would cut her impulse down, as frost cuts the life of flowers. Besides, there was something fresh and individual in her compositions.

"What does your husband think of these?" he asked one day.

"I don't show them to him."

She never had; she dreaded his ruthlessness when anything grated on his nerves—a breath of mockery would wither her belief in herself, frail enough plant already. The only person, besides her master, to whom she confided her efforts was—strangely enough—Rosek. He had surprised her one day copying out some music. The warmth with which he praised that little "caprice" was surely genuine; and she gratefully played him others, and then a song for him to sing. From that day she began to have for him a certain friendliness, to be a little sorry, watching him, pale, trim, and sphinxlike, in her drawing-room or garden, getting no nearer to the fulfilment of his desire. He had never again made love to her, though she knew that at the least sign he would. His face and his invincible patience were pathetic. She could not actively dislike one who admired

her so much. She consulted him about Fiorsen's debts. There were hundreds of pounds owing, besides much to Rosek himself. *How* did he get into debt like this? What became of the money he earned? His fees, this summer, were good. Was it on that girl, on other women, that he spent it?

Watching Fiorsen closely, she was conscious of a change, a sort of loosening, something in him had given way—as when, in winding a watch, the key turns on and on, the ratchet being broken. Yet he was working harder than ever. She would hear him, across the garden, going over and over a passage, as if he never would be satisfied. But his playing had lost its fire and sweep; was stale, and as if disillusioned; as though he had said to himself: 'What's the use?' In his face, too, there was a change. She knew—she was certain that he was drinking secretly. Was it his failure with her? or the girl? or simply heredity from a hard-drinking ancestry?

Gyp never faced these questions. To face them would mean useless discussion, useless admission that she could not love him, useless asseverations about the girl, useless denials of all sorts. Hopeless!

He was very irritable, and seemed to resent her music lessons, alluding to them with sneering impatience. She felt that he despised them as amateurish. He was often impatient, too, of the time she gave to the baby. His own conduct with the little creature was characteristic. He would go to the nursery, much to Betty's alarm, and be charming with the baby for about ten minutes, then dump it back into its cradle, stare at it gloomily, or utter a laugh, and go out. Sometimes he would come up when Gyp was there, and after watching her a little in silence, would drag her away.

Suffering always from the consciousness of having no love for him, and ever more from her sense that, instead of saving him, she was pushing him down-hill—ironical nemesis for vanity!—Gyp was more and more compliant to his demands on her. But this compliance, when all the time she felt further and further away, was straining her to breaking-point. Hers was a nature that passively endures till something snaps; after that—no more.

That spring and summer were like a long drought, with moisture gathering far away, coming nearer, nearer, till, at last, the deluge bursts and sweeps the garden.

XV

The tenth of July that year was as the first day of summer. There had been much fine weather, always easterly or northerly; but now, after a broken, rainy fortnight, the sun had come in full summer warmth with a gentle breeze, drifting here and there scent of opening lime-blossom. Under the trees at the far end of the garden, Betty was sewing a garment, and the baby was in her seventh morning sleep. Gyp stood before a bed of sweet peas—bright, frail growing things, whose little green tridents, branching out from the flat stems, resembled the antennæ of insects.

The sound of footsteps on the gravel made her turn to see Rosek coming from the drawing-room. He bowed, and said:

"Gustav is not up yet. I thought I would speak to you first. Can we talk?"

Hesitating just a second, Gyp drew off her gardening-gloves.

"Here? Or in the drawing-room?"

"In the drawing-room, please."

With a faint tremor she led the way, seating herself where she could see Betty and the baby. Rosek stood very still—the sweetish gravity of his well-cut lips and spotless dandyism stirred in her a kind of unwilling admiration.

"What is it?"

"A bad business, I'm afraid. Something must be done at once. I have been trying to arrange things, but they will not wait. They are even threatening to sell up this house."

With a sense of outrage, Gyp cried:

"Nearly everything here is mine."

Rosek shook his head.

"The lease is in his name—you are his wife. They can do it, I assure you. And I cannot help him any more—just now."

"No—of course! You ought not to have helped him at all. I can't bear—— How much does he owe altogether?"

"About thirteen hundred pounds. It isn't much, of course. But there is something else——"

"Worse?"

Rosek nodded.

"You will think again that I am trying to make capital

out of it. I cannot afford that you should think that, this time."

Gyp shook her head.

"No; tell me, please."

"There is a man called Wagge, an undertaker—the father of someone you know——"

"Daphne Wing?"

"Yes. A child is coming. They have made her tell. It means the cancelling of her engagements, of course—and other things."

Gyp said slowly:

"Can you tell me, please, what this Mr.—Wagge can do?"

"He is rabid—a rabid man of his class is dangerous. A lot of money will be wanted—some blood, perhaps."

He moved swiftly to her, and said very low:

"Gyp, it is a year since I told you of this. You did not believe me then. I told you, too, that I loved you. I love you more, now, a hundred times! Don't move! I am going up to Gustav."

He turned, and Gyp thought he was really going; but he stopped and came back past the line of the window. The expression of his face was so hungry, that, for a moment, she felt pity. It must have shown in her face, for he suddenly caught at her, and tried to kiss her lips; she wrenched back, and he could only reach her throat. Letting her go as suddenly, he bent his head and went out.

Gyp wiped his kisses off her throat with the back of her hand, dumbly, thinking: 'What have I done to be treated like this? What *have* I done?' And rage against all men flared up in her. Going to her bureau, she took out her address book and looked for the name: Wing—Frankland Street, Fulham. Unhooking her little bag from off the back of the chair, she put her chequebook into it. Then, taking care to make no sound, she passed into the hall, caught up her sunshade, and went out.

She walked quickly towards Baker Street. She had come out without gloves, and went into the first shop to buy a pair. In choosing them she forgot her emotions for a minute. Out in the street again, they came back bitterly. And the day was so beautiful—the sun bright, the sky blue, the clouds dazzling white; from the top of her 'bus she could see all its brillance. She remembered the man who had kissed her arm at her first ball. And now—this! Mixed with her rage was a sort of un-

willing compassion and fellow-feeling for that girl, that silly, sugar-plum girl, brought to such a pass by—her husband. In Fulham, she got down at the nearest corner, walked up a widish street of narrow grey houses till she came to the number. On that newly-scrubbed step, she very nearly turned and fled. What exactly had she come to do?

The door was opened by a servant in an untidy frock. Mutton! The smell of mutton—just as the girl had said!

"Is Miss—Miss Daphne Wing at home?"

"Yes; Miss Disey's in. D'you want to see 'er? What nyme?"

Then, opening the first of two brown doors, she said:

"Tyke a seat; I'll fetch her."

In the middle of that dining-room, Gyp tried to subdue the sense of nausea. The table against which her hand rested was covered with red baize, to keep the stains of mutton from penetrating to the wood. On a mahogany sideboard reposed a cruet-stand and a green dish of very red apples. A bamboo-framed talc screen painted with white and yellow marguerites stood before a fireplace filled with pampas-grass dyed red. The chairs were of red morocco, the curtains a brownish-red, the walls green, and on them hung a set of Landseer prints. This red and green in juxtaposition added to her distress. And, suddenly, her eyes lighted on a little deep-blue china bowl. It stood on a black stand on the mantelpiece, with nothing in it. In this room, with the smell of mutton creeping in, that bowl was from another world. Daphne Wing—not Daisy Wagge—had surely put it there! And it touched her—emblem of stifled beauty, of all that the girl had tried to pour out in her garden nearly a year ago. Thin Eastern china, good and beautiful! A wonder they allowed it to pollute this room!

A sigh made her turn. Back to the door, with a white, scared face, the girl was standing. Gyp thought: 'She has suffered horribly'; and held out her hand.

Daphne Wing sighed out: "Oh, Mrs. Fiorsen!" and kissed it. Gyp saw that her new glove was wet. Then the girl relapsed against the door. Gyp was swept again by rage against men, and fellow-feeling for one about to go through what she herself had just endured.

"It's all right," she said, gently; "only, what's to be done?"

Daphne Wing put her hands up over her white face and sobbed—so quietly but so terribly that Gyp herself had the utmost diffi-

culty not to cry. This was the real despair of a creature bereft of hope and strength, above all, of love—such weeping as is drawn from suffering souls only by the touch of fellow-feeling. It filled her with rage against Fiorsen, who had taken this girl for his pleasure and then thrown her away. She seemed to see him discarding her for cloying his senses and getting on his nerves, discarding her with caustic words, to abide alone the consequences of infatuation. She timidly stroked that shaking shoulder. The girl said brokenly:

"Oh, Mrs. Fiorsen, I do love him so!" A painful wish to laugh seized Gyp, making her shiver from head to foot. Daphne Wing saw it, and went on: "I know—it's awful; but I do—and now he——" Her quiet but really dreadful sobbing broke out again. And again Gyp began stroking her shoulder. "And I have been so awful to you! Oh, Mrs. Fiorsen, do forgive me, please!"

"Yes, yes; that's nothing! Don't cry—don't cry!"

Very slowly the sobbing died away, but still the girl held her hands over her face and her face down. The red and green room, the smell of mutton—creeping!

At last, a little of that white face showed; the lips, no longer craving for sugar-plums, murmured:

"It's you he—he—really loves all the time. And you don't love him—that's so funny. Oh, Mrs. Fiorsen, if I could just see him! He told me never to come again; and I haven't dared. I haven't seen him for three weeks—not since I told him about *it*. Oh! What shall I do?"

Gyp felt pity and yet violent revolt that any girl should want to crawl back to a man who had spurned her. Daphne Wing said piteously:

"I don't seem to have any pride. I don't mind what he does to me, or what he says, if only I can see him."

Gyp's revolt yielded to her pity.

"How long before?"

"Three months."

Three months—in this state of misery!

"I shall do something desperate. Now that I can't dance, and *they* know, it's too awful! If I could see him, I wouldn't mind anything. But I know he'll never want me again. Oh, Mrs. Fiorsen, I wish I was dead! I do!"

A heavy sigh escaped Gyp, and, bending suddenly, she kissed the girl's forehead. Still that scent of orange-blossom about her

skin or hair, as when she asked whether she ought to love or not; as when she came, moth-like, from the tree-shade into the moonlight, spun, and fluttered, with her shadow fluttering before her. To relieve the strain, she pointed to the bowl and said:

"*You* put that there, I'm sure."

The girl answered, with piteous eagerness:

"Oh, would you like it? Do take it. Count Rosek gave it me. Oh, that's papa. He'll be coming in!"

Gyp heard a man clearing his throat, and the rattle of an umbrella falling into a stand; the girl wilted and shrank against the sideboard. The door opened; Mr. Wagge entered. Short, thick, in a black frock coat and trousers, and a greyish beard, he stared. He looked what he was, an English chapel-goer, nourished on sherry and mutton, who could and did make his own way in the world. His features, coloured by a deep liverishness, were thick, like his body, and not ill-natured, except for the anger in his small, piggy grey eyes. In a voice permanently gruff, but impregnated with professional ingratiation, he said:

"Ye-es? Whom 'ave I——?"

"Mrs. Fiorsen."

The sound of his breathing could be heard distinctly; he twisted a chair round.

"Take a seat, won't you?"

Gyp shook her head.

In Mr. Wagge's face deference struggled with some more primitive emotion. Taking out a large, black-edged handkerchief, he blew his nose, passed it freely over his visage, and turning to his daughter, muttered:

"Go upstairs."

The girl turned quickly and went out. Mr. Wagge cleared his throat with a sound suggestive of enormously thick linings.

"May I ask what 'as given us the honour?"

"I came to see your daughter."

His little eyes travelled from her face to her feet, to his own watch-chain, to his hands rubbing themselves together, to her breast, higher than which they dared not mount. Their infinite embarrassment struck Gyp. She could almost hear him thinking: 'Now, how can I discuss this with that attractive young female, wife of the scoundrel who's ruined my daughter? Delicate—that's what it is!' The words burst hoarsely from him.

"It's an unpleasant business, ma'am. I don't know what to say. Reelly I don't. It's awkward; very awkward."

Gyp said quietly:

"Your daughter is desperately unhappy; that can't be good for her just now."

Mr. Wagge's thick figure seemed to swell.

"Pardon me, ma'am," he spluttered, "but I *must* call your 'usband a scoundrel. I'm sorry to be impolite, but I must do it. If I 'ad 'im 'ere, I don't know that I should be able to control myself—I don't indeed." Apparently interpreting a movement of her hand as sympathy, he went on in a stream of husky utterance: "It's delicate before a lady, and she the injured party; but one has feelings. From the first I said this dancin' was in the face of Providence; but women have no more sense than an egg. Her mother, she would have it. Career, indeed! Pretty career! I tell you, ma'am, I'm angry; if that scoundrel comes within reach of me, I shall mark 'im—I'm not a young man, but I shall mark 'im. An' what to say to you, I don't know. That my daughter should be'ave like that! Well, it's 'urt me. An' now I suppose her name'll be dragged in the mud. I tell you frankly, I 'oped you wouldn't hear of it, because after all the girl's got her punishment. And this divorce-court—it's not nice—it's an 'orrible thing for respectable people. And, mind you, I won't see my girl married to that scoundrel, not if you do divorce 'im. No; she'll have her disgrace for nothing."

Gyp raised her head, and said:

"There'll be no public disgrace, Mr. Wagge, unless you make it yourself. If you send Daphne—Daisy—quietly away somewhere till her trouble's over, no one need know anything."

Mr. Wagge's mouth opened slightly, his breathing could have been heard in the street.

"Do I understand you to say that you're not goin' to take proceedings, ma'am?"

Gyp inclined her head.

Mr. Wagge stood silent, slightly moving his pug face.

"Well," he said at length, "it's more than she deserves; but I don't disguise it's a relief to me. And I must say, in a young lady like you, and handsome, it shows a Christian spirit." Again Gyp shook her head. "Ah! but it do. As a man old enough to be your father—and a regular attendant."

He held out his hand. Gyp put her gloved hand into it.

"I'm very, very sorry. Please be nice to her."

Mr. Wagge stood for some seconds ruefully rubbing his hands together.

"I'm a domestic man," he said suddenly. "A domestic man in a serious line of life; and I never thought to have anything like this in my family—never! It's been—well, I can't tell you what it's been!"

Gyp took up her sunshade. She felt that she must get away; at any moment he might say something she could not bear—and the smell of mutton rising fast!

"I am sorry," she said again; "good-bye"; and moved past him to the door. She heard him breathing hard as he followed her to open it; he passed her and put his hand on the latch of the front door. His piggy eyes scanned her almost timidly.

"Well," he said, "I'm very glad to have the privilege of your acquaintance; and, if I may say so, you 'ave my 'earty sympathy. Good-day."

Gyp took a long breath. Her cheeks were burning; and, with a craving for protection, she put up her sunshade. But the girl's white face came up again before her, and the sound of her words:

"Oh, Mrs. Fiorsen, I wish I was dead! I *do!*"

XVI

She walked on beneath her sunshade, making unconsciously for the peace of trees. Her mind was a whirl—Daphne Wing against the door, Mr. Wagge's puggy countenance, the red pampas-grass, the blue bowl, Rosek swooping at her, her baby asleep under the trees!

She reached Kensington Gardens, and sat down. It was near the luncheon hour; nursemaids, dogs, perambulators, old gentlemen—all were hurrying toward their food. They glanced at this pretty young woman, leisured and lonely at such an hour, trying to find out what was wrong with her beauty—bow legs, or something, to balance a face like that! Gyp noticed none of them, except now and again a dog which sniffed her knees in passing. For so long she had cultivated insensibility, refused to face reality; but the barrier was forced now, and the flood had swept her away. "Proceedings!" To those who shrink from letting their affairs be known even by their nearest friends, the notion of a public exhibition of troubles simply never comes; it had certainly never come to Gyp. With a bitter smile she thought: 'I'm better off than she is, after all! Suppose I loved him, too? No, I never—never—want to love. Women who love suffer too much.'

She sat a long time before remembering that she was due at Monsieur Harmost's at three o'clock. It was well past two already; and she set out across the grass. The day was full of murmurings of bees and flies, cooings of pigeons, soft swish and stir of leaves, the scent of lime-blossom under a sky blue, with a few white clouds slow and calm and full. Why be unhappy? And one of those spotted spaniel dogs which have broad heads, with frizzy topknots, and are always rascals, circled her, hoping she would throw her sunshade on the water for him to fetch, in his view the only reason why anything was carried in the hand.

Monsieur Harmost was fidgeting about his room, whose opened windows could not rid it of the scent of latakia.

"I thought you were not coming!" he said. "You look pale. Is it the heat? Or"—he looked hard into her face—"has someone hurt you, my little friend?" Gyp shook her head. "Ah! yes, you tell me nothing; you tell nobody nothing! You close

up your pretty face like a flower at night. At your age, my child, one should make confidences; a secret grief is to music as the east wind to the stomach. Come, tell me your troubles. For a long time I have been meaning to ask. We are only once young; I want to see you happy."

Would it be a relief to pour her soul out? His brown eyes questioned her like an old dog's. She did not want to hurt one so kind. And yet—impossible!

Monsieur Harmost sat down at the piano. Resting his hands on the keys, he looked round at her.

"I am in love with you, you know. Old men can be very much in love, but they know it is no good—that makes them endurable. Still, we like to feel of use to youth and beauty; it gives us a little warmth. Tell me your grief!" He waited a moment, then said irritably: "Well, well, we go to music then!"

It was his habit to sit by her at the piano, but to-day he stood as if prepared to be exceptionally severe. And Gyp played, whether from overexcited nerves or from not having had any lunch, better than she had ever played—the Chopin polonaise in A flat, that song of revolution, which had always seemed so unattainable. When she had finished, Monsieur Harmost lifted one of her hands and put his lips to it. She felt the scrub of his little bristly beard, and raised her face with a sigh of satisfaction. A voice behind them said mockingly:

"Bravo!"

Fiorsen stood in the doorway.

"Congratulations, *madame!* I have long wanted to see you under the inspiration of your—master!"

Gyp's heart began to beat. Monsieur Harmost had not moved. His eyes were startled.

Fiorsen kissed the back of his own hand.

"This old Pantaloon! Pho-o—what a lover!"

Gyp saw the old man quiver; she sprang up, crying: "You brute!"

Monsieur Harmost's voice behind her said:

"Before you go, *monsieur*, give me some explanation of this imbecility!"

Fiorsen shook his fist, and went out muttering. They heard the front door slam. Gyp turned abruptly to the window, and stood looking into the back yard. Even there summer had crept in. The leaves of the sumach-tree were glistening; in a

patch of sunlight, a black cat with a blue ribbon round its neck was basking. The voice of one hawking strawberries drifted from a side street. She *knew* that Monsieur Harmost was standing with a hand pressed to his mouth, and she felt a passion of compunction and anger. Kind and harmless old man—to be so insulted! It was the culmination of all her husband's outrages! She would never forgive him this! He had insulted her as well, beyond what could be endured! She turned, and put both her hands into Monsieur Harmost's.

"I'm so awfully sorry. Good-bye, dear, dear Monsieur Harmost; I shall come on Friday!" And, before he could stop her, she was gone.

Just as she reached the pavement on the other side, she felt her dress plucked and saw Fiorsen behind her. She shook herself free and walked swiftly on. Was he going to make a scene in the street? Again he caught her arm. She faced round on him, and said, in an icy voice:

"Please don't make scenes in the street, and don't follow me like this. If you want to talk to me, you can—at home."

Then, very calmly, she walked on. But he still followed her, some paces off. To the first cab that passed she made a sign.

"Bury Street—quick!" She saw Fiorsen rush forward, too late to stop her. He stood still, deadly pale under his broad-brimmed hat. She was far too angry and upset to care.

She had determined to go to her father. She would not go back to Fiorsen; but how to get Betty and her baby? Winton was almost sure to be at his club. And leaning out, she said: "No; Hyde Park Corner, please."

The hall porter, who knew her, after calling to a page-boy: "Major Winton—sharp, now!" came out of his box to offer her a seat and *The Times*.

Gyp sat with the journal on her knee, vaguely conscious of a thin old gentleman anxiously weighing himself in a corner, of a white-calved footman crossing with a tea-tray; a number of hats on pegs; the green-baize board with its white rows of tapelike paper, and three members standing before it. One, tall, stout, good-humoured, in *pince-nez* and a white waistcoat, removed his straw hat and took up a position whence, without staring, he could gaze at her; he seemed to find her to his liking. Then her father's unhurried figure passed that little group; and eager to get out of this sanctum of masculinity, she met him at the top of the low steps.

"I want to talk to you, Dad."

He gave her a quick look, selected his hat, and followed to the door. In the cab, he put his hand on hers.

"Now, my dear?"

"I want to come back to you. I can't go on there. It's—it's—I've come to an end."

His hand pressed hers tightly, as if trying to save her the need for saying more. Gyp went on:

"But I must get baby; I'm terrified he'll try to keep her, to get me back."

"Is he at home?"

"I don't know. I haven't told him that I'm going to leave him."

Winton looked at his watch.

"Does the baby ever go out as late as this?"

"Yes; after tea. It's cooler."

"I'll take this cab on, then. You stay and get the room ready for her. Don't worry, and don't go out till I return."

How wonderful of him not to have asked a single question!

The cab stopped at the Bury Street door. He said quietly:

"Do you want the dogs?"

"Yes—oh, yes! He doesn't care for them."

"All right. There'll be time to get you in some things for the night after I come back. I shan't run any risks to-day. Make Mrs. Markey give you tea."

Gyp watched the cab gather way again, saw him wave his hand; and, with a deep sigh, half anxiety, half relief, she rang the bell.

XVII

In St. James's Street, Winton gave the order: "Quick as you can!" A little red had come into his brown cheeks; his eyes under their half-drawn lids were keener; his lips tightly closed; he looked as he did when a fox was breaking cover. He was going to take no risks—make no frontal attack. Time for that later, if need were. He had better nerves than most men, and that steely determination and resource which makes many Englishmen of his class formidable in small operations. At Fiorsen's he kept his cab, rang, and asked for Gyp, with a kind of pleasure in his ruse.

"She's not in yet, sir. Mr. Fiorsen's in."

"Ah! And baby?"

"Yes, sir."

"I'll come in and see her. In the garden?"

"Yes, sir."

"Dogs there, too?"

"Yes, sir. And will you have tea, please, sir?"

"No, thanks." How to effect this withdrawal without causing gossip, and suspicion of collusion with Gyp? And he added: "Unless Mrs. Fiorsen comes in."

Passing out into the garden, he became aware that Fiorsen was at the dining-room window watching him. The baby was under the trees at the far end, and the dogs came rushing with a fury which lasted till they came within scent of him. Winton went up to the perambulator, and, saluting Betty, looked down at his grandchild. She lay under an awning of muslin, for fear of flies, and was awake. Her solemn, large, brown eyes, already like Gyp's, regarded him with gravity. Clucking to her, he moved so as to face the house and have Betty with her back to it.

"I'm here with a message from your mistress, Betty. Keep your head; don't look round, but listen to me. She's at Bury Street and going to stay there; she wants you and baby and the dogs." The stout woman's eyes and mouth opened. Winton put his hand on the perambulator. "Steady! Go out as usual with this thing. It's about your time; and wait for me at the turning to Regent's Park. I'll come on in my cab and pick

you all up. Don't get flurried; don't take anything; do exactly as you usually would. Understand?"

It is not in the nature of stout women with babies in their charge to receive such an order without question. Her colour, and the heaving of that billowy bosom, made him add quickly:

"Now, Betty, pull yourself together; Gyp wants you. I'll tell you all about it in the cab."

"Yes, sir. Poor little thing! What about its night-things? And Miss Gyp's?"

Conscious of that figure still at the window, Winton made some passes at the baby.

"Never mind them. As soon as you see me at the drawing-room window, get ready and go. Eyes front, Betty; don't look round; I'll cover your retreat! Don't fail Gyp, now. Pull yourself together."

With a vast sigh, Betty murmured: "Very well, sir; oh, dear!" and adjusted the strings of her bonnet. Winton saluted, and began his march again towards the house. He kept his eyes to this side and that, as if examining the flowers, but noted that Fiorsen had receded from the window, and, entering by the drawing-room window, he went quickly into the hall. He listened a second before opening the dining-room door. Fiorsen was pacing up and down. He stared haggardly at Winton, who said:

"How are you? Gyp not in?"

"No."

That "No" touched Winton with a vague compunction. To be left by Gyp! But his heart hardened again. The fellow was such a rotter.

"Baby looks well," he said.

Fiorsen began to pace up and down again.

"Where is Gyp? I want her."

Winton took out his watch.

"It's not late." And suddenly he felt aversion for the part he was playing. To get the baby; to make Gyp safe—yes! But not this pretence that he knew nothing about it. He turned on his heel and walked out. He could not stay prevaricating like this. Had that woman got clear? He went back into the drawing-room. They were just passing the side of the house. In five minutes they would be down at the turning. He stood waiting. If only that fellow did not come in! Through the partition wall he could hear him still tramping up and down

the dining-room. What a long time a minute was! Only three had gone when he heard the dining-room door opened, and Fiorsen crossing the hall to the front door. What was he after, standing there as if listening? And suddenly Winton heard him sigh—just such a sound as many times, in the long-past days, had escaped himself, waiting, listening for footsteps, in parched and sickening anxiety. Did this fellow then really love? And in revolt at spying on him, he advanced and said:

"Well, I won't wait any longer. Good-bye!" The words: "Give my love to Gyp," perished on their way up to his lips.

"Good-bye!" Fiorsen echoed. Winton went out under the trellis, conscious of that forlorn figure still standing at the half-opened door. Betty was nowhere in sight; she must have reached the turning. His mission had succeeded, but he felt no elation. Round the corner, he picked up his convoy, and, with the perambulator hoisted on to the taxi, journeyed on at speed. He had meant to explain in the cab, but all he said was:

"You'll all go down to Mildenham to-morrow."

And Betty, who had feared him ever since their encounter so many years ago, eyed his profile, without daring to ask questions. Winton stopped at a post-office on the way, and sent this telegram:

"Gyp and the baby are with me—letter follows.—WINTON."

It salved his conscience; besides, it was necessary, lest Fiorsen should go to the police. The rest must wait till he had talked with Gyp.

It was late before they could begin their talk.

Close to the open windows where Markey had placed two hydrangea plants—bought on his own responsibility, in token of silent satisfaction—Gyp began. She kept nothing back, recounting the whole miserable fiasco of her marriage. When she came to Daphne Wing and her discovery in the music-room, she could see the glowing end of her father's cigar move convulsively. In her own house—her own house! And—after that, she had gone on with him! He did not interrupt, but his stillness almost frightened her.

Coming to the incidents of the day, she hesitated. Must she tell him too, of Rosek? Candour prevailed, and Winton made no sign. When she had finished, he got up and slowly extinguished the end of his cigar against the window-sill; then looking at her lying back in her chair as if exhausted, he said: "By God!" and turned to the window.

At that hour before the theatres rose, a lull brooded in the London streets, broken by the clack of a half-drunken woman bickering at her man as they lurched along home, and the strains of a street musician's fiddle, trying to make up for a blank day. The sound vaguely irritated Winton, reminding him of those two damnable foreigners by whom she had been so treated. To have them at the point of a sword or pistol—to teach them a lesson! He heard her say:

"Dad, I should like to pay his debts. Then things would be as they were when I married him."

He emitted an exasperated sound. He did not believe in heaping coals of fire.

"I want to make sure, too, that the girl is all right till she's over her trouble. Perhaps I could use some of that—that other money, if mine is all tied up?"

Anger, not disapproval of her impulse, made him hesitate; money and revenge would never be associated in his mind.

"I want to feel as if I'd never let him marry me. Perhaps his debts are all part of that—who knows?"

How like—her figure sunk back in the old chair, and the face lifted in shadow! And exultation came to Winton. He had got her back!

XVIII

Fiorsen's bedroom was—as the maid would remark—"a proper pigsty"—until he was out of it and it could be renovated each day. He had a talent for disorder, so that the room looked as if three men instead of one had gone to bed in it. Clothes and shoes, brushes, water, tumblers, newspapers, French novels, and cigarette-ends—none were ever where they should have been; and the stale fumes from cigarettes incommoded anyone whose duty it was to take him tea and shaving-water. When, on the morning of that day, the maid had brought Rosek up to him, he had been lying a long time on his back, dreamily watching the smoke from his cigarette and four flies waltzing in the sunlight that filtered through the green sun-blinds. This hour, before he rose, was his creative moment, when he could best see the form of music and feel inspiration for its rendering. Of late, he had been stale and dull; but this morning he felt again the stir of fancy, that vibrating, half-dreamy state when emotion finds shape and the mind pierces through to new expression. Hearing the maid's knock, and her murmured: "Count Rosek to see you, sir," he thought: 'What the devil does he want?' A larger nature, drifting without control, in contact with a smaller which knows its own mind exactly, will instinctively be irritable.

It would be money he had come about, or—that girl! That girl—he wished she were dead! Soft, clinging creature! A baby! God! What a fool he had been—ah, what a fool! First Gyp—then her! He had tried to shake the girl off. As well try to shake off a burr! How she clung! He had been patient—patient and kind, but how to go on when one was tired! He wanted only Gyp, only his own wife? And now, when for an hour or two, he had shaken off worry, been feeling happy—this fellow must come, and stand there with his face of a sphinx!

"Well, Paul! sit down. What troubles have you brought?"

Rosek lit a cigarette. He struck even Fiorsen by his unsmiling pallor.

"You had better look out for Mr. Wagge, Gustav; he came to me yesterday. He has no music in his soul."

Fiorsen sat up.

"Satan take Mr. Wagge! What can he do?"

"I am not a lawyer, but I imagine he can be unpleasant—the girl is young."

Fiorsen glared at him, and said:

"Why did you throw me that cursed girl?"

"I did not, my friend."

"You did. What was your game? You never do anything without a game. You know you did. Come, what was your game?"

"You like pleasure, I believe."

Fiorsen said violently:

"Look here: I have done with your friendship—I have never really known you. It is finished. Leave me in peace."

Rosek smiled.

"My dear, friendships are not finished like that. You owe me a thousand pounds."

"Well, I will pay it. My wife will lend it to me."

"Oh! Is she so fond of you? I thought she only loved her music-lessons."

Crouching forward with his knees drawn up, Fiorsen hissed out:

"Get out of this! I will pay you your thousand pounds."

Rosek, still smiling, answered:

"Don't be a fool, Gustav! With a violin to your shoulder, you are a man. Without—you are a child. Lie quiet, my friend, and think of Mr. Wagge. But you had better come and talk it over with me. Good-bye for the moment. Calm yourself." And, flipping the ash off his cigarette on to the tray by Fiorsen's elbow, he went.

Fiorsen put his hand to his head. Cursed be every one of them—the father and the girl, Rosek and all the other sharks! He went out on to the landing. The house was quite still below. Rosek had gone—good riddance! He called to Gyp. No answer. He went into her room, superlatively dainty, with a scent of cyclamen! He looked out into the garden. There was the baby at the end, and that fat woman. No Gyp! Never in when she was wanted. Wagge! He shivered; and, going back into his bedroom, took a brandy-bottle from a locked cupboard and drank some. It steadied him; he locked up the cupboard again, and dressed.

Going out to the music-room, he stopped under the trees to make passes with his fingers at the baby. Sometimes he felt that it was an adorable little creature, with its big, dark eyes

so like Gyp's. Sometimes it excited his disgust—a discoloured brat. This morning, while looking at it, he thought suddenly of the other that was coming—and grimaced. Catching Betty's stare of horrified amazement at the face he was making at her darling, he burst into a laugh and turned away into the music-room.

While he was keying his violin, Gyp's conduct in never having come there for so long, struck him as bitterly unjust. As if that wretched girl made any real difference! Gyp had never loved him, never given him what he wanted, never quenched his thirst of her! That was the heart of it. No other woman had ever been like that—kept his thirst unquenched. He had always tired of them before they tired of him. She gave him nothing! Had she no heart or did she give it elsewhere? What had Paul said about her music-lessons? And suddenly it struck him that he knew nothing, absolutely nothing, of where she went or what she did. Music-lessons? Every day, nearly, she went out, was away for hours. Where? To the arms of another man? He put down his violin in actual sickness. Why not? That whipping of the sexual instinct which makes the ache of jealousy so terrible, was at its full in such a nature as Fiorsen's. He shuddered. But the remembrance of her fastidious pride, her candour, above all her passivity, cut in across his fear. No, not Gyp!

He went to a little table whereon stood a tantalus, and pouring out some brandy, drank. It steadied him. And he began to practise. He took a passage from Brahms's violin concerto and played it over and over. He found he was repeating the same flaws each time; he was not attending. The fingering of that thing was ghastly! Music-lessons! Why did she take them? Waste of time and money—she would never be anything but an amateur! Had she gone there to-day? It was past lunch-time. Perhaps she had come in.

He went back to the house. No sign of her! The maid came to ask if he would lunch. No! Was the mistress to be in? She had not said. He went into the dining-room, ate a biscuit, and drank a brandy and soda. It steadied him. He came back to the drawing-room and sat down at Gyp's bureau. How tidy! On the little calendar a pencil-cross was set against to-day—Wednesday, another against Friday. What for? Music-lessons! He reached to a pigeon-hole, and took out her address book.

"H—Harmost, 305A, Marylebone Road," and against it the words in pencil, "3 p.m."

Three o'clock. That was her hour! His eyes rested on a little old coloured print of a Bacchante, with flowing green scarf, shaking a tambourine at a naked Cupid, who with a baby bow and arrow in his hands, was gazing up at her. He turned it over: on the back was written in a pointed, scriggly hand, "To my little friend.—E. H." Fiorsen went to the piano. He opened it and began to play, staring vacantly before him, scarcely knowing what he played. A great artist? Often, nowadays, he did not care if he never touched a violin again. Tired of standing up before a sea of dull faces, seeing the blockheads knock their silly hands one against the other! Sick of the sameness of it all!

He got up, went into the dining-room, and drank some brandy. Gyp could not bear his drinking. Well, she shouldn't be out so much—taking music-lessons. Music-lessons! Nearly three o'clock. He would go and see what she really did—go and offer her his escort home! An attention. It might please her. Better than waiting here till she chose to come in with her face closed up. He drank a little more brandy, took his hat and went. He walked in the hot sun, and reached the house feeling dizzy. A maid-servant opened the door:

"I am Mr. Fiorsen. Mrs. Fiorsen here?"

"Yes, sir; will you wait?"

Why did she look at him like that? Ugly girl! How hateful ugly people were! When she was gone, he reopened the door of the waiting-room, and listened.

Chopin! The polonaise in A flat. Good! Could that be Gyp? Very good! He moved out, down the passage, drawn on by her playing, and softly turned the handle. The music stopped. He went in.

When Winton had left him, an hour and a half later that afternoon, Fiorsen continued to stand at the front door. The brandy-nurtured burst of jealousy which had made him insult his wife and old Monsieur Harmost, had died suddenly when Gyp turned on him in the street and spoke in that icy voice; since then he had felt fear, increasing every minute. Would she forgive? To one who always acted on the impulse of the moment, so that he rarely knew afterward exactly what he had done, or whom hurt, Gyp's self-control had ever been mysterious and a little frightening. Where had she gone? Why

did she not come in? His anxiety, like a ball rolling downhill, gathered momentum. Suppose she did not come back! But she must—there was the baby—their baby!

For the first time, the thought of it gave him unalloyed satisfaction. He left the door, and, after drinking a glass to steady him, flung himself down on the sofa in the drawing-room. And while he lay there, the brandy warm within him, he thought: 'I will turn over a new leaf; give up drink, give up everything, send the baby into the country, take Gyp to Paris, Berlin, Vienna, Rome—anywhere out of England, away from that father of hers and all these stiff, dull folk! She loves travelling!' Yes, they would be happy! Delicious nights—delicious days—air that did not weigh you down and make you feel that you must drink—real inspiration—real music! The wood-smoke scent of Paris streets, the blistening of the Thiergarten, a serenading song in a Florence back street, fireflies in Italian summer dusk—he had intoxicating memories of them all! The warmth of the brandy died away, he felt chill and shuddery. He shut his eyes, thinking to sleep till she came in. But very soon he opened them, because—a thing usual with him of late—he saw such ugly things—faces, vivid, changing as he looked, growing ugly and uglier, becoming all holes—holes—holes——Corruption—matted, twisted, human tree-root faces! Horrible! He opened his eyes, for when he did that they went. It was very silent. No sound from above. No sound of the dogs. He would go up and see the baby.

While he was crossing the hall, there came a ring. A telegram! He tore the envelope.

"Gyp and the baby are with me—letter follows—WINTON."

With a laugh he shut the door in the boy's face, and ran upstairs; why——! There was nobody there now! Did it mean that she had really left him? He stopped by Gyp's bed, and flinging himself forward, lay across it, burying his face. And he sobbed, unmanned by drink. Had he lost her? Never to see her eyes closing and press his lips against them! Never to soak his senses in her loveliness! He leaped up. Lost her? Absurd! That calm, prim, devilish Englishman, her father—he had worked it all—stealing the baby!

He went downstairs and drank some brandy. It steadied him a little. What should he do? "Letter follows." Go to Bury Street? No. Drink! Enjoy himself!

Catching up his hat, he went out, walking furiously, till his

head began to whirl; then, taking a cab, was driven to a Soho restaurant. He had eaten nothing but a biscuit since breakfast, always a small matter, and he ordered soup and a flash of their best Chianti—solids he could not face. More than two hours he sat, white and silent, perspiration on his forehead, now and then grinning and flourishing his fingers, to the amusement and sometimes the alarm of those sitting near. But for being known there, he would have been regarded with suspicion. About half-past nine, having finished his wine, he got up, put a piece of gold on the table, and went out without waiting for his change.

The lamps were lighted, but daylight not quite gone. He walked unsteadily, toward Piccadilly. A girl of the town passed and looked up at him. Staring hard, he hooked his arm in hers; it steadied him, and they walked on together. Suddenly the girl stopped and tried to disengage her arm; a frightened look had come into her dark-eyed powdered face. Fiorsen held it firm, and laughed. "Come on!" he said. "You are like my wife. Will you have a drink?"

The girl shook her head, and, with a sudden movement, slipped her arms out and dived away like a swallow through the pavement traffic. Fiorsen stood still and laughed. The second time to-day *She* had slipped from his grasp. Passers looked at him, amazed. Ugly devils! With a grimace, he turned out of Piccadilly, past St. James's Church, and made for Bury Street. They wouldn't let him in, of course! But he would look at the windows; they had flower-boxes! And, suddenly, he groaned aloud—thinking of Gyp among the flowers at home. He came in at the bottom of the street, where a fiddler in the gutter was scraping on an old violin. Fiorsen stopped to listen. Poor devil! Pagliacci! He put his hand on the man's shoulder.

"Friend," he said, "lend me your fiddle. I am a great violinist. I'll make some money for you."

"*Vraiment, Monsieur!*"

"Ah! *Vraiment! Voyons! Donnez—un instant—vous verrez.*"

The fiddler, doubting but hypnotised, handed him the fiddle; his dark face changed when he saw the stranger fling it up to his shoulder and the ways of his fingers with the bow and strings. Fiorsen had begun to walk up the street, searching for the flower-boxes. He saw them, stopped, and began playing "*Che faro?*" He played it wonderfully on that poor fiddle; and the fiddler, who had followed at his elbow, stood watching, uneasy, envious, a little entranced. This tall, pale *monsieur*

with the strange face and the drunken eyes and hollow chest, played like an angel! Ah, but it was not so easy as all that to make money in the streets of this sacred town! You might play like forty angels and not a copper! He had begun another tune now—like little pluckings at your heart—*très joli—tout à fait écœurant!* But there it was—a *monsieur* as usual closing the window, drawing the curtains! Always same thing! The violin and the bow were thrust back into his hands with some silver; and the tall strange *monsieur* was off as if devils were after him —not badly drunk, that one! And with an uneasy feeling that he had been involved in something that he did not understand, the lame, dark fiddler limped his way round the nearest corner, and for two streets at least did not stop. Then, counting the silver Fiorsen had put into his hand and carefully examining his fiddle, he uttered the word "*Bigre!*" and started for home.

XIX

Gyp hardly slept at all. Three times she rose, stole to the door, and looked in at her sleeping baby. The afternoon had shaken her nerves. It was so hot, and the sound of the violin was still in her ears. By that little air of Poise, she had known for certain it was Fiorsen; and her father's abrupt drawing of the curtains had clinched that certainty. If she had seen him, she would not have been half so disturbed as by that echo of an old emotion. It had reforged the link which yesterday she had thought broken for good. The sobbing of that old fiddle had been his way of saying, "Forgive me; forgive!" To leave him would have been so much easier if she had really hated him. Difficult to live with, he was quite as difficult to hate. He was so flexible—only the rigid can be hated. She hated the things he did, and him when he was doing them; but afterward again could hate him no more than she could love him, and that was —not at all. Resolution and a sense of the practical came back with daylight. It was better to recognize that things were hopeless and harden one's heart.

Winton, whose night had been as sleepless—to play like a beggar in the street, under his windows, had seemed to him the limit!—announced at breakfast that he must see his lawyer, and find out what could be done to secure Gyp against persecution. Some deed was probably necessary; he was vague on all such matters. In the meantime, neither Gyp nor the baby must go out. Gyp spent the morning writing to Monsieur Harmost, trying to express her chagrin, without saying that she had left Fiorsen.

Her father came back from Westminster quiet and angry. He had with difficulty been made to understand that the baby was Fiorsen's property, so that, if the fellow claimed it, in law they would be unable to resist. The point opened the old wound, forced him to remember that his own daughter had once belonged to another—father. He had told the lawyer that he would see the fellow damned first, and had directed him to draw a deed of separation, providing for the payment of Fiorsen's existing debts on condition that he left Gyp and the baby in peace. After telling Gyp this, he went into the extempore

nursery. Until then, the little creature had only been of interest as part of Gyp; now it had for him an existence of its own—this tiny, dark-eyed creature, watching him so gravely, clutching his finger. Suddenly the baby smiled—not a beautiful smile, but one that made on Winton an indelible impression.

Wishing first to settle this matter of the deed, he put off going down to Mildenham; but "not trusting those two scoundrels a yard," he insisted that the baby should not go out without two attendants, and that Gyp should not go out alone. He carried precaution to the point of accompanying her to Monsieur Harmost's on the Friday afternoon, and expressed a wish to go in and shake hands with the old fellow. It was a queer meeting. Those two had as great difficulty in finding anything to say as though they had been denizens of different planets. When, after a minute or so of friendly embarrassment, he retired to wait for her, Gyp sat down to her lesson.

Monsieur Harmost said quietly:

"Your letter was very kind, my little friend—and your father is very kind. But, after all, it was a compliment your husband paid me." And his smile seemed to sum up many resignations. "So you stay again with your father! When will you find your fate, I wonder?"

"Never!"

"Ah, you think! No, that is impossible! Well, we must not waste your father's time. To work."

Winton's comment in the cab was:

"Quite a nice old chap!"

At Bury Street, they found Gyp's agitated parlour-maid. Going to do the music-room that morning, she had "found the master sitting on the sofa, holding his head, and groaning awful. He's not been at home, ma'am, since you—you went on your visit, so I didn't know what to do. I ran for cook and we got him up to bed, and not knowing where you'd be, ma'am, I telephoned to Count Rosek, and he came—I hope I didn't do wrong—and he sent me down to see you. The doctor says his brain's on the touch and go, and he keeps askin' for you, ma'am. So I didn't know what to do."

Gyp, pale to the lips, said:

"Wait here a minute, Ellen," and went into the dining-room. Winton followed.

"Oh, Dad, what am I to do? His brain! It would be too

awful to feel I'd brought that about. I must go and see. If it's really that, I couldn't bear it. I'm afraid I must go, Dad."

Winton nodded.

"I'll come too," he said. "The girl can go back in the cab and say we're on the way."

Taking a parting look at her baby, Gyp thought bitterly: '*This* is my fate, and no getting out of it!' On the journey, she and Winton were silent—but she held his hand tight. While the cook was taking up to Rosek the news of their arrival, Gyp stood looking out at her garden. Two days and six hours only since she had stood there above her pansies; since, at this very spot, Rosek had kissed her throat! And slipping her hand through Winton's arm, she said:

"Dad, please don't make anything of that kiss. What does it matter?"

A moment later Rosek entered. Before she could speak, Winton said:

"Now that my daughter is here, there will be no further need for your kind services. Good-day!"

Gyp gave the tiniest start forward. She had seen the curt words go through Rosek's armour as a sword through brown paper. With a sickly smile, he bowed, and went out. Winton followed—precisely as if he did not trust him with the hats in the hall. When the outer door was shut, he said:

"I don't think he'll trouble you again."

Gyp's gratitude was qualified by a queer compassion. His offence had only been that of wanting her.

Fiorsen had been taken to her room, which was larger and cooler than his own. He opened his eyes presently:

"Gyp! Is it you? The awful things I see—don't go away again! Oh, Gyp!" He raised himself and rested his forehead against her. And Gyp felt—as on the first night he came home drunk—a merging of other emotions in the desire to protect.

"It's all right," she murmured. "I'm going to stay. Keep quite quiet, and you'll soon be well."

In a quarter of an hour he was asleep. The expression of terror which had been coming and going on his face until he fell asleep went to her heart. Anything to do with the brain was so horrible! She must stay—his recovery depended on her. She was still sitting there, motionless, when the doctor came and beckoned her out. He looked a kindly man, with two waistcoats; and while he talked, he winked at Gyp, and, with each wink she

felt that he ripped the veil off one more domestic secret. Sleep was the ticket! Had something on his mind—yes! And—er—a little given to—brandy? All that must stop! Stomach as well as nerves affected. Seeing things—nasty things—sure sign. Not a very careful life before marriage. And married—how long? His kindly eyes swept Gyp from top to toe. Year and a half! Quite so! Hard worker at his violin? No doubt! Musicians always a little inclined to be immoderate—too much sense of beauty—burn the candle at both ends! She must see to that. She had been away, had she not—staying with her father? Yes. No one like a wife for nursing. Treatment? Well! One would shove in a dash of what he would prescribe, night and morning. Perfect quiet. No stimulant. A little cup of strong coffee without milk, if he seemed low. In bed at present. No worry; no excitement. Young man still. Plenty of vitality. No undue anxiety. To-morrow they would see whether a night nurse would be necessary. No violin for a month, no alcohol—in every way the strictest moderation! And with a last wink, leaning heavily on the word "moderation," he took out a stylographic pen, scratched on a leaf of his notebook, shook Gyp's hand, smiled, buttoned his upper waistcoat, and was gone.

Gyp went back to her seat by the bed. Irony! She whose only desire was to be free, was mainly responsible for his breakdown! But for her, there would be nothing on his mind—he would not be married! His drinking, debts, even the girl—had she caused them, too? And when she tried to free him and herself—this was the result! Was there something fatal in her that destroyed the men she had to do with? She had made her father unhappy, Monsieur Harmost—Rosek, and her husband! Even before she married, how many had tried for her love, and gone away unhappy! And, going up to a mirror, she looked at herself long and sadly.

XX

Three days after her abortive attempt to break away, Gyp wrote to Daphne Wing, telling her of Fiorsen's illness, and mentioning a cottage near Mildenham, where—if she liked to go—she would be comfortable and safe from curiosity, and finally begging to be allowed to make good the losses from broken dance contracts.

Next morning she found Mr. Wagge with a tall, crape-banded hat in his black-gloved hands, standing in the very centre of her drawing-room. He was staring into the garden, as if vouchsafed a vision of that warm night when the moonlight shed ghostly glamour on the sunflowers, and his daughter had danced out there. She had a perfect view of his thick red neck in a turndown collar, crossed by a black bow over a shiny white shirt. And, holding out her hand, she said:

"How do you do, Mr. Wagge? It was kind of you to come."

Mr. Wagge turned. His pug face wore a downcast expression.

"I hope I see you well, ma'am. Pretty place you 'ave 'ere. I'm fond of flowers myself. They've always been my 'obby."

"They're a great comfort in London."

"Ye-es; I should think you might grow the dahlia 'ere." Having obeyed the obscure instincts of *savoir faire,* satisfied some obscure desire to flatter, he went on: "My girl showed me your letter. I didn't like to write; in such a delicate matter I'd rather be vivey vocey. Very kind, in your position, I'm sure. I always try to do the Christian thing myself. Flesh passes; you never know when you may have to take your turn. I said to my girl I'd come and see you."

"I'm very glad. I hoped perhaps you would."

Mr. Wagge cleared his throat, and went on.

"I don't want to say anything harsh about a certain party in your presence, especially as I read he's indisposed, but really I hardly know how to bear the situation. I can't bring myself to think of money in relation to that matter; all the same, it's a serious loss to my daughter, very serious loss. I've got my family pride to think of. My daughter's name, well—it's my own; and, though I say it, I'm respected—a regular attendant—I think I told you. Sometimes, I assure you, I feel I can't

control myself, and it's only that—and you, if I may say so, that keeps me in check."

His black-gloved hands were clenching and unclenching, and he shifted his broad, shining boots. Gyp gazed at them, not daring to look up at his eyes thus turning from Christianity to shekels, from his honour to the world, from his anger to herself.

"Please let me do what I ask, Mr. Wagge. I should be so unhappy if I mightn't do that little something."

Mr. Wagge blew his nose.

"It's a delicate matter," he said. "I don't know where my duty lays. I don't, reelly."

Gyp looked up.

"The great thing is to save Daisy suffering, isn't it?"

Mr. Wagge's face wore for a moment an expression as if from the thought: 'Sufferin'! You must leave that to her father!' Then it wavered; the furtive warmth of the attracted male came for a moment into his little eyes; he averted them, and coughed. Gyp said softly:

"To please me."

Mr. Wagge's readjusted glance stopped in confusion at her waist. He answered, in a voice that he strove to soften:

"If you put it that way, I don't reelly know 'ow to refuse; but quite between you and me—I can't withdraw my attitude."

"Of course. Thank you so much; you'll let me know later. I mustn't take up your time now." And she held out her hand.

Mr. Wagge took it in a lingering manner.

"Well, I *have* an appointment," he said; "a gentleman on Campden Hill. He starts at twelve. I'm never late. *Good* morning."

When she had watched him, square and black, pass through the outer gate, busily rebuttoning those shiny gloves, she went upstairs and washed her face and hands.

For several days Fiorsen wavered; but his collapse had come just in time, and with every hour the danger lessened. At the end of a fortnight of a perfectly white life, there remained nothing to do, in the words of the doctor, but "to shove in sea air, and avoid recurrence of the predisposing causes." Gyp had locked them all up, including herself; she could control him so long as he was tamed by his own weakness. But she passed some very bitter hours before she sent for her baby, Betty, and

the dogs, and definitely took up life in her own house again. His debts had been paid, including the thousand pounds to Rosek, and the losses of Daphne Wing. The girl had gone down to that cottage where no one had ever heard of her, to pass her time in lonely terror, with the aid of a black dress and a gold band on her third finger.

August and the first half of September were spent near Bude. Fiorsen's passion for the sea kept him singularly moderate and free from restiveness. He had been thoroughly frightened, and such terror is not easily forgotten. They stayed in a farmhouse, where he was at his best with the simple folk, and his best could be charming. He was always trying to get his "mermaid" away from the baby, away to himself, along the grassy cliffs and among the rocks and yellow sands. His delight was to find every day some new nook where they could bathe, and dry themselves by sitting in the sun. And very like a mermaid she was, on a seaweedy rock, with her feet close together in a little pool, her fingers combing her drowned hair. If she had loved him! But though, close to nature like this, he was much more easy to bear, her heart never opened to him, never fluttered at his voice, or beat more quickly under his kisses. Her eyes when they looked at her baby, and when they looked at him, were so different that not even an egoist could help seeing; he began to hate that tiny rival, and she began to notice that he did.

When the weather broke, he grew restless, craving his violin, and they went back to town, in robust health. Gyp had never been free from the feeling that it was just a lull, and the moment they were back, the feeling gathered density, as rain gathers in the sky after a fine spell. She had often thought of Daphne Wing, and had written, getting in return this answer:

"Dear Mrs. Fiorsen,

"Oh, it is kind of you to write, because I know what you must be feeling about me; and it was so kind of you to let me come here. I try not to think about things, but of course I can't help it; and I don't seem to care what happens now. Mother is coming down here later on. Sometimes I lie awake all night, listening to the wind. Don't you think the wind is the most melancholy thing in the world? I wonder if I shall die? I hope I shall. Oh, I do, really! Good-bye, dear Mrs. Fiorsen. I shall never forgive myself about you.

"Your grateful, Daphne Wing."

The girl had never once been mentioned between her and Fiorsen; she did not know whether he ever gave the little dancer a thought, or even knew what had become of her. But now that the time was getting near, Gyp felt more every day as if she must go down and see her. She wrote to her father, who, after a dose of Harrogate with Aunt Rosamund, was back at Mildenham. Winton answered that the nurse was there, and that there seemed to be a woman, presumably the mother, staying with her, but that he had not of course made direct inquiry. Could not Gyp come down? He was alone, and cubbing had begun. It was like him to veil his longings under such dry statements. But the thought of giving him pleasure, and of a gallop with hounds fortified her feeling that she ought to go. Baby was well, Fiorsen not drinking, she might surely snatch this little holiday and satisfy her conscience about the girl. Since Cornwall, she had played for him in the music-room as of old, and she chose the finish of a morning practice to say:

"I want to go to Mildenham this afternoon for a week. Father's lonely."

She saw his neck grow red.

"To him? No. He will steal you as he stole the baby. Let him have the baby if he likes. Not you. No."

At this unexpected outburst, revolt blazed up in her. She never asked him anything; he should not refuse this. He came up behind and put his arms round her.

"My Gyp, I want you here—I am lonely, too. Don't go away."

She tried to force his arms apart, but could not, and her anger grew. She said coldly:

"There's another reason."

"No good reason—to take you from me."

"The girl who is going to have your child is staying near Mildenham, I want to see how she is."

He let go of her then, and recoiling against the divan, sat down. And Gyp thought: 'I'm sorry—but it serves him right.'

"She may die. I must go; but you needn't be afraid I that shan't come back. I shall be back to-day week; I promise."

He looked at her fixedly.

"Yes. You don't break your promises; you will not break it." But, suddenly, he said again: "Gyp, don't go!"

"I must."

He caught her in his arms.

"Say you love me, then!"

But she could not. It was one thing to put up with embraces, quite another to pretend that. When at last he was gone, she sat smoothing her hair, staring before her with hard eyes, thinking: 'Here—where I saw him with that girl! What animals men are!'

Late that afternoon, she reached Mildenham. Winton met her at the station. On the drive up, they passed the cottage where Daphne Wing was staying. It stood in front of a small coppice, a creepered, plain-fronted, little brick house, with a garden still full of sunflowers, tenanted by the old jockey, Pettance, his widowed daughter, and her three small children. "That talkative old scoundrel," as Winton called him, was still employed in the Mildenham stables, and his daughter was laundress to the establishment. Gyp had secured for Daphne Wing the nurse who had watched over her own event; the same old doctor, too, was to be the presiding deity. There were no signs of life about the cottage, and she would not stop, too eager to be at home again, see the old rooms, smell the old savour of the house, get to her old mare, and feel its nose nuzzling her for sugar. It was so good to be back once more, feeling strong and well and able to ride. The smile of Markey at the front door was a joy to her, even the darkness of the hall, where a gleam of last sunlight fell across the skin of Winton's first tiger, on which she had so often sunk down dead tired after hunting.

In her mare's box, old Pettance was putting a last touch to cleanliness. His shaven, skin-tight old face smiled deeply.

"Good evenin', miss; beautiful evenin', ma'am!" And his little burning brown eyes, just touched by age, regarded her lovingly.

"Well, Pettance, how are you? And how's Annie, and how are the children? And how's this old darling?"

"Wonderful, miss; artful as a kitten. Carry you like a bird to-morrow, if you're goin' out."

"How are her legs?"

And Gyp passed her hand down those iron legs.

"They 'aven't filled not once since she come in—she was out all July and August; but I've kept 'er well at it since, in 'opes you might be comin'."

"They feel splendid." Still bending, Gyp asked: "And how is your lodger—the young lady I sent you?"

"Well, ma'am, she's very young, and these very young ladies they get a bit excited, you know, at such times; I should say she've never been——" With obvious difficulty he checked the words, "to an 'orse before!" "Well, you must expect it. And her mother, she's a dreadful funny one. She does needle me! Oh, she puts my back up properly! No class, of course—that's where it is. But this 'ere nurse—well, you know, miss, she won't 'ave no nonsense; so there we are. And, of course, she's bound to 'ave 'ighsteria, a bit—losin' her 'usband as young as that."

Gyp could feel his wicked old smile even before she raised herself. What did it matter if he did guess? He would keep a stable secret.

"Oh, we've 'ad some pretty flirts-up and cryin', dear me! I sleeps in the next room—oh, yes, at night-time—when you're a widder at that age, you can't expect nothin' else. I remember when I was ridin' in Ireland for Captain O'Neill, there was a young woman——"

Gyp thought: 'I mustn't let him get off—or I shall be late for dinner,' and she said:

"Oh, Pettance, who bought the young brown horse?"

"Mr. Bryn Summer'ay, ma'am, over at Widrington, for an 'unter, and 'ack in town, miss."

"Summerhay? Ah!" Gyp recalled the young man with the clear eyes and teasing smile, on the chestnut mare, the bold young man who reminded her of somebody.

"That'll be a good home for him, I should think."

"Oh, yes, miss; good 'ome—nice gentleman, too. He come over here to see it, and asked after you. I told 'im you was a married lady now, miss. 'Ah,' he said; 'she rode beautiful!' And he remembered the 'orse well. The major, he wasn't 'ere just then, so I let him try the young un; he popped 'im over a fence or two, and when he come back he says, 'Well, I'm goin' to have 'im.' Speaks very pleasant an' don't waste no time—'orse was away before the end of the week. Carry 'im well; 'e's a strong rider, too, and a good plucked one, but bad 'ands, I should say."

"Yes, Pettance; I must go in now. Will you tell Annie I shall be round to-morrow, to see her?"

"Very good, miss. 'Ounds meet at Filly Cross, seven-thirty. So you'll be goin' out?"

"Rather. Good night."

Flying back across the yard, Gyp thought: '"She rode beautiful!" How jolly. I'm glad he's got my horse.'

XXI

Glowing from her morning in the saddle, she started out next day at noon on her visit to the cottage. It was one of those lingering mellow mornings of late September, when the air, just warmed through, lifts off the stubbles, and the hedgerows are not yet dried of dew. The short cut led across two fields, a narrow strip of village common, where linen was drying on gorse bushes coming into bloom, and one field beyond; she met no one. Crossing the road, she passed into the cottage garden. Sunflowers and Michaelmas daisies in great profusion were tangled along the low red-brick garden walls, under some poplar trees yellow-flecked already. A single empty chair, with a book turned face downward, stood outside an open window. Smoke wreathing from one chimney was the only sign of life. Standing undecided before the half-open door, Gyp was conscious of too much stillness, of something unnatural in the silence. She was just raising her hand to knock, when she heard the sound of smothered sobbing. Peeping through the window, she saw a woman dressed in green, evidently Mrs. Wagge, seated at a table, crying into her handkerchief. And at that moment a low moaning came from the room above. Gyp went in and knocked on the door of the room where the woman in green was sitting. It was opened, and Mrs. Wagge stood there. The nose and eyes and cheeks of her thin, acid face were red, and in her green dress, and with her greenish hair (for it was going grey and she put on it a yellow lotion smelling of cantharides), she seemed to Gyp just like one of those green apples that turn reddish so unnaturally in the sun. Her face shone in streaks, and her handkerchief was still crumpled in her hand. It was horrible to come, fresh and glowing, into the presence of this poor woman, evidently in bitter sorrow. And a desire came over Gyp to fly. It seemed dreadful for anyone connected with *him* to be coming here at all. She said softly:

"Mrs. Wagge? Please forgive me—but is there any news? It was I who got Daphne down here."

The woman before her, evidently torn this way and that, at last answered, with a sniff:

"It—it—was born this morning—dead."

Gyp gasped. To have gone through it all for that! Mother-feeling rebelled and sorrowed; but reason said: Better so! Much better!

"How is she?"

"Bad—very bad. I don't know, I'm sure, what to say—my feelings are all anyhow, and that's the truth. It's so dreadfully upsetting altogether."

"Is my nurse with her?"

"Yes. She's a very headstrong woman, but capable, I don't deny. Daisy's very weak. Oh, it *is* upsetting! And now I suppose there'll have to be a burial. There really seems no end to it. And all because of—of that man." Mrs. Wagge turned away again to cry into her handkerchief.

Gyp stole out. She hesitated whether to go up or no, but at last she mounted softly. It would be in the front room that the bereaved girl was lying—the girl who, but a year ago, had debated with such naïve self-importance whether it was her duty to take a lover. The nurse opened the door an inch, and seeing who it was, slipped through into the corridor.

"You, my dear! That's nice!"

"How is she?"

"Fairly well—considering. You know about it?"

"Yes; can I see her?"

"I hardly think so. I can't make her out. She's got no spirit, not an ounce. She doesn't want to get well, I believe. It's the man, I expect." And, looking at Gyp, she asked: "Is that it? Is he tired of her?"

"Yes, nurse."

The nurse swept her up and down.

"It's a pleasure to look at you. You've got quite a colour, for you. After all, I believe it *might* do her good to see you. Come in!"

Gyp passed in behind her. With eyes closed, fair hair still damp on the forehead, one white hand lying on the sheet above her heart—what a frail madonna of the sugar-plums! On all that bed the only colour seemed the gold hoop round the wedding finger.

"Look, my dear; I've brought you a nice visitor."

Daphne Wing's eyes and lips opened, and closed again. And the thought went through Gyp: 'Poor thing! She thought it was going to be him, and it's only me!' The white lips said:

"Oh, Mrs. Fiorsen, it's you—it is kind of you!" Again the eyes opened, but very little, differently.

The nurse had slipped away. Gyp sat down, and timidly touched the hand.

Two tears slowly ran down the girl's cheeks.

"It's over," she said just audibly, "and there's nothing now—it was dead, you know. I don't want to live. Oh, Mrs. Fiorsen, why can't they let me die, too?"

Gyp bent over, stroking the hand, unable to bear the sight of those two slowly rolling tears. Daphne Wing murmured on:

"You *are* good to me. I wish my poor little baby hadn't died."

Gyp raised herself and managed to get out the words:

"Bear up! Think of your work!"

"Dancing!" She gave the least little laugh. "It seems so long ago!"

"Yes; but now it'll all come back to you again."

Daphne Wing answered by a feeble sigh.

With eyes and mouth closed, and all alabaster white, the face was perfect, purged of its little commonnesses. Strange freak that this white flower of a face could ever have been produced by Mr. and Mrs. Wagge!

Daphne Wing opened her eyes.

"Oh! Mrs. Fiorsen, I feel so weak, and lonely—there's nothing anywhere."

Gyp got up, carried into the mood of the girl's heart, and afraid it would be seen.

"When nurse said she'd brought a visitor, I thought it was him; but I'm glad now. If he had looked at me like he did—I'd have died straight off."

Gyp put her lips to the damp forehead, where, very faint, was still the scent of orange-blossom.

Back in the garden, she hurried away; but, instead of crossing the fields, turned past the side of the cottage into the coppice behind. And, sitting down on a log, her hands pressed to her cheeks and her elbows to her breast, she stared at the sunlit bracken and the flies chasing over it. Love! Was it always hateful and tragic? Darting and taking, and darting away! Or darting one on the other, then breaking away too soon. Did never two dart, seize, and cling, and ever after be one? Love! It had spoiled her father's life, and Daphne Wing's; never came when wanted; always when not. Malevolent wanderer, tiring of

the spirit before the body; or the body before the spirit. Better have nothing to do with it—far better! Who that was free would become a slave like Daphne Wing? Like her own husband to his want of a wife who did not love him! Like her father had been—to a memory! And watching the sunlight on the bracken, Gyp thought: 'Love! Keep far from me!'

Every morning she made her way to the cottage, every morning passed through the hands of Mrs. Wagge. The good lady had taken a fancy to her, confiding to the nurse, who confided it to Gyp, that she was "very distangey—and such pretty eyes, quite Italian." She was one of those many whose passion for distinction was a little too much for their passionate propriety. Worship of distinction had caused her to foster her young daughter's talent for dancing. Who knew to what it might lead in these days? She explained to Gyp how she had always "brought Daisy up like a lady—and now this is the result." And she would look piercingly at Gyp's hair or ears, hands, or instep. The burial worried her dreadfully. "I'm using the name of Daisy Wing; she was christened 'Daisy' and the Wing's professional, so that takes them both in, and is quite the truth. But I don't think anyone would connect it, would they? About the father's name, do you think I might say the late Mr. Joseph Wing? You see, it never was alive, and I must put something. I couldn't bear they should guess the truth; Mr. Wagge would be so distressed. It's in his own line, you see. Oh, it is upsetting!"

Gyp would murmur:

"Oh! yes, anything."

Though deathly white and spiritless, it soon became clear that Daphne Wing was going to pull through. With each day, more colour and commonness came back. She would, in the end, return to Fulham purged of her infatuation, a little harder, perhaps a little deeper.

On the last day, Gyp wandered again into the coppice, and sat down on the same log. The light shone level on the yellowing leaves all round her; a startled rabbit pelted out of the bracken and back, and, from the far edge of the little wood, a jay cackled harshly, shifting its perch. Now that she was so near having to go back to Fiorsen, she knew that she had not been wise to come. Contact with the girl had made the thought of life with him less tolerable even than before. Only the longing to see her baby made return seem possible. She was very

near to loathing at that moment. He, the father of her baby! The thought seemed ridiculous. That little creature seemed to bind him to her no more than if it were the offspring of some chance encounter, some pursuit of nymph by faun. No! It was hers alone. But a sudden feverish longing to get back to it overpowered all other thought.

Next morning Winton took her back to London. Putting her into the cab, he asked:

"Have you still got your key of Bury Street? Good! Remember, Gyp—any time day or night—there it is for you."

She had wired to Fiorsen, and reached home soon after three. He was not in, and her telegram lay unopened in the hall. She ran up to the nursery. The pathetic sound of some small creature that cannot tell what is hurting it, met her ears. She went in with the half-triumphant thought: 'Perhaps that's for me!'

Betty, very flushed, was rocking the cradle, and examining the baby's face with a perplexed frown. Seeing Gyp, she gasped:

"Oh, be joyful! Oh, my dear! I *am* glad. I can't do anything with baby since the morning. Whenever she wakes, she cries like that. And till to-day she's been a little model. There, there!"

Gyp took up the baby, whose black eyes fixed themselves on her mother in momentary contentment; but, at the first movement, she began again her fretful plaint. Betty went on:

"She's been like that ever since this morning, when Mr. Fiorsen came in. The fact is, baby don't like it. He stares at her so. This morning I thought—well—I thought: 'You're her father. It's time she was getting used to you.' So I let them be a minute; and when I came back—I was only just across to the bathroom—he was comin' out lookin' quite fierce, and baby—screamin'! And except for sleepin', she's hardly stopped cryin' since."

Pressing the baby to her breast, Gyp sat very still.

"How has he been, Betty?"

Betty plaited her apron; her moon-face troubled.

"Well," she said, "I think he's been drinkin'. Oh, I'm sure he has—I've smelt it about him. The third day it began. And night before last he came in dreadfully late—I could hear him abusing the stairs as he was comin' up. Oh dear—it *is* a pity."

The baby, who had been still since she lay in her mother's lap, suddenly raised her voice again. Gyp said:

"Betty, I believe something hurts her arm. She cries the moment she's touched there. Is there a pin or anything? Just see. Take her things off. Oh—look!"

Both the tiny arms above the elbow were circled with dark marks, as if they had been squeezed by ruthless fingers. The two women looked at each other in horror.

"He!"

Gyp had flushed crimson; her eyes filled but dried at once. At sight of her face, now gone very pale, with lips tightened to a line, Betty stopped her outburst of ejaculation. When they had wrapped the baby's arms in remedies and cottonwool, Gyp went into her bedroom, and, throwing herself down on her bed, burst into a passion of weeping, smothering it in her pillow.

It was the crying of sheer rage. The brute! To dig his claws into that precious mite! Just because the poor little thing cried at that cat's stare of his! The brute! The devil! And he would come to her and whine about it, and say: "My Gyp, I never meant—how should I know I was hurting? Her crying was so—— Why should she cry at me? I was upset! I wasn't thinking!" She could hear him pleading and sighing to her to forgive him. But she would not—this time! Her fit of crying ceased. She lay listening to the tick of the clock, marshalling a hundred little evidences of his malevolence toward her baby—his own baby. How could he? Was he really going mad? And such chilly shuddering seized her that she crept under the eiderdown. She retained just enough sense of proportion to understand that this, like his insults to Monsieur Harmost, her father and others, were ungovernable accesses of nerve-irritation. But this did not lessen her feeling. Her baby! That tiny thing! She hated him at last; and lay thinking out the coldest, cruellest, most cutting things to say. She had been too long-suffering.

He did not come in that evening; and she went up to bed at ten o'clock. She had a longing to have the baby with her—a feeling that to leave her was not safe. She carried her off, still sleeping, and, locking her doors, got into bed. For a long time she lay awake, expecting every minute to hear him return. She fell asleep at last, and woke with a start. There were vague noises down below. It must be he! She had left the light on in her room, and leaned over to look at the baby's face. It was still sleeping, drawing its tiny breaths peacefully. Gyp sat up by its side.

Yes; he *was* coming up, and, by the sounds, not sober:—a

loud creak, a thud, as if he had clutched at the banisters and fallen; muttering, and the noise of boots dropped. Swiftly she thought: 'If he were quite drunk, he would not have taken them off at all;—nor if he were quite sober. Does he know I'm back?' Another creak, as if he were raising himself by the banisters, a creeping and breathing behind the door—then he fumbled at the door and turned the handle. He must know that she was back, had noticed her travelling-coat or seen the telegram. The handle was tried again, then, after a pause, the handle of the door between his room and hers was fiercely shaken. She could hear his voice, flown with drink, thick, a little drawling.

"Gyp—let me in—Gyp!"

After that, sounds were more confused, as if he were now at one door, now at the other; then creakings, as if on the stairs again; after that, no sound at all.

Fully half an hour Gyp continued to sit up, straining her ears. Where was he? What doing? On her over-excited nerves possibilities came crowding. He must have gone downstairs again. In that half-drunken state, where would his baffled frenzies lead him? And, suddenly, she thought that she smelled burning. It went, and came again; she crept to the door, noiselessly turned the key, and pulling it open a few inches, sniffed.

All was dark on the landing. There was no smell of burning out there. Suddenly, a hand clutched her ankle. All the blood rushed from her heart; she stifled a scream, and tried to pull the door to. But his arm and her leg were caught between, and she saw the black mass of his figure lying full-length on its face. Like a vise his hand held her; he drew himself up on to his knees, on to his feet, and forced his way through. Panting, in utter silence, Gyp struggled to drive him out. His drunken strength seemed to come and go in gusts, but hers was continuous, greater than she had ever thought, and she panted:

"Go! go out of my room—you—you—wretch!"

Then her heart stood still with horror; he had slued round to the bed and was stretching his hands out above the baby.

She flung herself on him from behind, dragging his arms down, and, clasping her hands together, held him fast. He twisted round in her arms and sat down on the bed. In that moment of his collapse, Gyp snatched up her baby and fled out, down the dark stairs, hearing him stumbling, groping in pursuit. She fled into the dining-room and locked the door, heard

him run against it and fall down. Snuggling her baby, who was crying now, inside her nightgown for warmth, she stood rocking and hushing it, trying to listen. There was no more sound. By the hearth, whence a little heat still came forth, she cowered down. With cushions and the thick white felt from the dining-table, she made the baby snug, and wrapped her shivering self in the tablecloth, sat staring wide-eyed before her—always listening. There were sounds at first, then none. A long, long time she stayed like that, before she stole to the door. She did not mean to make a second mistake. She could hear the sound of heavy breathing, and listened to it, till she was certain it was the breathing of sleep. Then stealthily she opened, and looked. He was lying against the bottom stair in heavy, drunken slumber. She knew that sleep so well; he would not wake from it.

It gave her a sort of evil pleasure that they would find him like that in the morning when she was gone. Taking the baby, with infinite precaution, she stole past him. Once more in her locked room, she went to the window and looked out. Just before dawn; her garden grey and ghostly—the last time she would see it!

She did her hair and dressed in furs—she was very cold and shivery. She took a few little things she was fondest of and slipped them into her wrist-bag with her purse. She did everything very swiftly, wondering at her own power of knowing what to take. When she was ready, she scribbled a note to Betty to follow with the dogs to Bury Street, and pushed it under the nursery door. Then, wrapping the baby in jerseys and a shawl, she went downstairs. The dawn had broken, grey light was striking into the hall. She passed Fiorsen's sleeping figure safely, and, for one moment, stopped for breath. He was lying with his back against the wall, his head in the hollow of an arm raised against a stair, his face turned a little upward. That face which, hundreds of times, had been so close to her own, and something about this crumpled body, about his tumbled hair, those cheekbones, and the hollows beneath, about the lips just parted under the dirt-gold of his moustache—something of lost divinity in all that inert figure—clutched for a second at Gyp's heart. Just for a second. It was over, this time! Never again! And, turning stealthily, she slipped her shoes on, opened the front door, took up her burden, closed the door softly behind her, and walked away.

PART III

I

Gyp was going up to town. All the winter and spring she had been at Mildenham, riding, and pursuing her music, seeing hardly anyone except her father; and this departure for London brought her the feeling that comes on an April day, when the sky is blue, with white clouds, and in the fields the grass is warm for the first time. At Widrington a porter entered her carriage, with a kit-bag, an overcoat, and some golf-lubs; and round the door a little group clustered. Gyp noted a tall woman whose blonde hair was going grey, a young girl with a fox-terrier on a lead, a young man with a Scotch terrier under his arm and his back to the carriage. The girl was kissing the Scotch terrier's head.

"Good-bye, old Ossy! Was he nice! Tumbo, keep *down! You're* not going!"

"Good-bye, dear boy! Don't work too hard!"

The young man's answer was not audible, but it was followed by irrepressible gurgles and a smothered:

"Oh, Bryan, you *are*—— Good-bye, dear Ossy!" "Good-bye!" "Good-bye!" The young man got in. Then the train moved. Gyp caught a side view of him, waving his hat from the carriage window. It was her acquaintance of the hunting-field—the "Mr. Bryn Summer'ay," as old Pettance called him, who had bought her horse last year. Seeing him pull down his overcoat, to bank up the old Scotch terrier against the jolting of the journey, she thought: 'I like men who think first of their dogs.' His round head, with curly hair, broad brow, clean-cut lips, gave her again the wonder: 'Where *have* I seen someone like him?' He raised the window, and said:

"How would you like—— Oh, how d'you do! We met out hunting. You don't remember me, I expect."

"Yes; perfectly. And you bought my horse last summer. How is he?"

"In great form. I forgot to ask what you called him; I've

named him Hotspur—he'll never be steady at his fences. I remember how he pulled with you that day."

They were silent, smiling.

Looking at the dog, Gyp said:

"*He* looks rather a darling. How old?"

"Twelve. Beastly when dogs get old!"

There was another little silence while he contemplated her with his clear eyes.

"I came over to call once—with my mother; November the year before last. Somebody was ill."

"Yes—I."

"Badly?"

Gyp shook her head.

"I heard you were married——" The little drawl in his voice had increased, as though covering the abruptness of that remark. Gyp looked up.

"Yes; but my little daughter and I live with my father again."

"Ah! What a run that was!"

"Perfect! Was that your mother on the platform?"

"Yes—and my sister Edith. Extraordinary dead-alive place, Widrington; I expect Mildenham isn't much better?"

"It's very quiet, but I like it."

"By the way, I don't know your name now?"

"Fiorsen."

"Oh, yes! The violinist. Life's a bit of a gamble, isn't it?"

Gyp did not answer that odd remark. He took from his pocket a little red book.

"Do you know these? I always take them travelling. Finest things ever written!"

The book was open at the lines:

> "Let me not to the marriage of true minds
> Admit impediment. Love is not love
> Which alters when it alteration finds,
> Or bends with the remover to remove——"

Gyp read on:

> "Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
> Within his bending sickle's compass come.
> Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks
> But bears it out even to the edge of doom——"

The sun, far down in the west, shone almost level over wide, whitish-green space, and the spotted cattle browsed or stood by the ditches, lazily flicking their tufted tails. A shaft of sunlight flowed into the carriage, filled with dust motes; and, handing the little book back through that streak of radiance, she said softly:

"Do you read much poetry?"

"More law, I'm afraid. But it is about the finest thing in the world, isn't it?"

"No; I think music."

"Are you a musician? You look as if you might be. I should think you had it badly."

"Thank you. And you haven't it at all?"

"I like opera."

"The hybrid form—and the lowest!"

"That's why it suits me. Don't you like it, though?"

"Yes; that's why I'm going up to London."

"Really? Are you a subscriber?"

"This season."

"So am I. Good—I shall see you."

Gyp smiled. It was long since she had talked to a man of her own age, long since she had seen a face that roused her curiosity and admiration, long since she had been admired. The sun-shaft, shifted by a westward trend of the train, bathed her from the knees up; its warmth increased her light-hearted sense of being in luck.

Much can be talked of in two or three hours of a railway journey! And round them a friendly after-warmth will cling. The difficulty of making themselves heard provoked confidential utterance. The isolation carried their friendship faster and further than any spasmodic acquaintanceship of weeks. In that long talk he was far the more voluble. There was too much of which she could not speak. She liked listening to his slightly drawling voice—his audacious wit, the irrepressible bubble of laughter that kept breaking from him. He disclosed his past freely—public-school and college life, efforts at the Bar, his ambitions, tastes, even his scrapes. And in this spontaneous unfolding there was perpetual flattery; Gyp felt through it all a sort of subtle admiration. He asked her, presently, if she played piquet.

"I play with my father nearly every evening."

"Shall we have a game?"

She knew he only wanted to play because he could sit nearer,

joined by the evening paper over their knees, hand her the cards after dealing, touch her hand by accident, look in her face. And this was not unpleasant; for she, in turn, liked looking at his face, which had "charm"—that something light and unepiscopal, lacking to so many solid, handsome faces.

When he gripped her hand to say good-bye, she gave his an involuntary little squeeze. Standing by her cab, with a look of frank, rather wistful, admiration on his face, he said:

"I shall see you at the opera, then, and in the Row perhaps; and I may come along to Bury Street, some time, mayn't I?"

Nodding, Gyp drove off through the sultry London evening. Her father was not in, and she went straight to her room. After so long in the country, it seemed very close. Putting on a wrapper, she sat down to brush the train-smoke out of her hair.

For months after leaving Fiorsen, she had felt nothing but relief. Only of late had she begun to see her new position—that of a woman married yet not married; disillusioned, yet in secret seeking a real mate, with every hour that ripens her heart and beauty. Gazing at her face, reflected, intent and mournful, in the mirror, she saw her arid position more clearly than she had ever seen it. What was the use of being pretty? No longer use to anyone! Not yet twenty-six, and in a nunnery! With a shiver, though not of cold, she drew her wrapper close. This time last year she had at least been in the main current of life. And yet—better far be derelict like this than go back to him whom memory painted always standing over her sleeping baby, with his arms stretched out and his fingers crooked like claws.

After that early-morning escape, Fiorsen had lurked after her for weeks, in town, at Mildenham, and even in Scotland, when Winton carried her off there. But she had not weakened in her resolution a second time, and he had given up pursuit, and gone abroad. Since then—nothing had come from him, save a few wild or maudlin letters, written evidently during drinking-bouts. Even they had ceased, and for four months she had heard no word. He had "got over" her, it seemed, wherever he was.

She stopped brushing, and thought of that walk with her baby through the empty, silent streets, in the early misty morning last October, of waiting dead-tired, on the pavement, ringing till they let her in. Often, since, she had wondered how fear could have worked her up to that weird departure. Her father and

Aunt Rosamund had wanted her to try for a divorce. But her instincts refused to let everyone know her secrets and sufferings —refused to hollow pretence involved, that she had loved him when she never had. It had been her fault for marrying him without love——

> "Love is not love
> Which alters when it alteration finds!"

What irony—if her fellow-traveller had only known!

She got up from before the mirror, looking round her room, the same she had always slept in as a girl. So he had remembered her all this time! It had not seemed like meeting a stranger. They were not strangers now, anyway. And, suddenly, on the wall before her, she saw his face. Of course! How stupid of her not to have known at once! There, in a brown frame, hung a photograph of the celebrated Botticelli or Masaccio "Head of a Young Man" in the National Gallery. She had fallen in love with it years ago, and on the wall of her room it had been ever since. That broad face, the clear eyes, the bold, clean-cut mouth, the audacity—only, the live face was English, not Italian, had more humour, more "breeding," less poetry—something "old Georgian" about it. How he would laugh if she told him he was like that peasant-acolyte with fluffed-out hair, and a little ruching round his neck! Smiling, she plaited her own hair and got into bed.

She could not sleep; she heard her father come in and go up to his room, heard the clocks strike midnight, then one, then two, and always the dull roar of Piccadilly. She had nothing over her but a sheet, and still it was too hot. There was a scent in the room, as of flowers. Where could it come from? She got up at last, and went to the window. here, behind the curtains, was a bowl of cyclamen. Her father's thought—how sweet of him!

And, burying her nose in those blossoms, she remembered her first ball. Perhaps Bryan Summerhay had been there! If he had been introduced to her then, if she had happened to dance with him instead of with that man who had kissed her arm, might she not have felt different towards all men? And if he had admired her—and had not everyone, that night—might she not have liked, perhaps more than liked, him in return? Or would she have looked on him as on all her swains before she

met Fiorsen, so many moths fluttering round a candle, foolish to singe themselves! Perhaps she had been bound to have her lesson, to be humbled and brought low!

With a cyclamen blossom to her nose, she went up to that picture. She could just see the outline of the face and the eyes gazing at her: in her heart, something faintly stirred, as a leaf turns over, as a wing flutters. And, blossom and all, she clasped her hands over her breast, where again her heart quivered with that faint, shy tremor.

It was late, no—early, when she fell asleep and had a strange dream. She was riding her old mare through a field of flowers. She had on a black dress, and round her head a crown of bright, pointed crystals; she sat without saddle, her knee curled up, perched so lightly that she hardly felt the mare's back, and the reins she held were long twisted stems of honeysuckle. Singing as she rode, her eyes flying here and there, over the field, up to the sky, she felt lighter than thistledown; and while they raced along, the old mare kept turning her head and biting at the honeysuckle flowers. Then, suddenly, that chestnut face became the face of Summerhay, looking back at her with his smile. She awoke. Sunlight, through the curtains where she had opened them to find the flowers, was shining on her.

II

Late that same night, Summerhay came out of the little Chelsea house, which he inhabited, and walked towards the river. In certain moods men turn insensibly towards any open space—downs, woods, waters—where the sky is free to the eye. A man is alone when he loves, alone when he dies; nobody cares for one so absorbed, and he cares for nobody, no—not he! Summerhay stood by the river-wall and looked up at the stars through the plane-tree branches. Every now and then he drew a long breath of the warm, unstirring air. And he thought of little, of nothing; but a sweetish sensation beset his heart, a kind of quivering lightness his limbs. He sat down on a bench and shut his eyes. He saw a face—only a face. The lights went out one by one in the houses opposite; no cabs passed now, and scarce a passenger was afoot, but Summerhay sat like a man in a trance, the smile coming and going on his lips; and the air above the river stirred with the tide flowing up.

It was just coming dawn, when he went in, and, instead of going to bed, sat down to a case in which he was junior on the morrow, and worked right on till it was time to ride before his bath and breakfast. He had one of those constitutions—not uncommon among barristers—that thrive on long spurts. With capacity and a liking for his work, he was on his way to make his name; though, at times, no one could drift more imperturbably on the tides of the moment. He was something of a paradox. He chose to live in that little Chelsea house rather than in the Temple or St. James's, for the sake of solitude; yet he was an excellent companion, whose many friends felt for him an affectionate distrust. To women, he was almost universally attractive, but he had kept heart-free on the whole. He was a gambler, the sort who gets in deep, and then, by a plucky, lucky plunge, gets out again, until some day perhaps—he stays there. His father, a diplomatist, had been dead fifteen years; his mother was well known in the semi-intellectual circles of society. He had no brothers, two sisters, and an income of his own. Such was Bryan Summerhay at the age of twenty-six, with his wisdom-teeth to cut.

When he started that morning for the Temple, he had still a

feeling of extraordinary lightness, still saw that face—its perfect regularity, warm pallor, dark smiling eyes rather wide apart, its fine, small, close-set ears, and the sweep of the black-brown hair across the low brow. Or was it something much less definite he saw—an emanation, a trick, a turn, an indwelling grace, a something that appealed and touched him? It would not let him be, and he did not desire that it should. For this was in his character; if he saw a horse that he liked, he put his money on it whenever it ran; if charmed by an opera, he went to it over and over again; if by a poem, he learned it by heart. And while he walked along the river—his usual route—he had queer sensations, and felt happy.

He was rather late, and went at once into court. In wig and gown, he was notably "old Georgian." A beauty-spot or two, a full-skirted coat, a sword and snuff-box, with that grey wig or its equivalent, and there would have been the eighteenth-century —the strong, light build, the breadth of face, brown pallor, clean and unpinched cut of lips, the slight insolence and devil-may-caredom, the clear glance, the bubble of vitality. Almost a pity to have been born so late!

When at last in chambers, he had washed off that special reek of clothes, and parchment, faraway herrings, and distemper, which clings about the Law, dipping his whole curly head in water, and towelling vigorously, he set forth along the Embankment, smoking a cigar. It was nearly seven. Just this time yesterday he had got into the train and seen the face which had refused to leave him since. Fever recurs at certain hours. One could not call at seven o'clock! But he could go up Bury Street on the way to his club!

He passed his boot shop, where, for some time, he had been meaning to give an order, and went by thinking: 'I wonder where *she* goes for things.' Her figure came to him so vividly —sitting in her corner, or standing by the cab, her hand in his. She had been scented like flowers, and—and a rainy wind! He stood still before a plate-glass window, not taking in at all the reflected image of his frowning, rueful face, and the cigar extinct between his lips. He walked on faster. He came to Bury Street, with a queer, weak sensation down the back of his legs. No flower-boxes this year broke the plain front of Winton's house; nothing whatever but its number and the beating of his heart marked it out for Summerhay from any other dwelling. Turning into Jermyn Street, he felt suddenly morose. His

club was at the top of St. James's Street, and he passed at once into the least frequented room. This was the library; and going to the French section, he took down "The Three Musketeers," seating himself with his back to anyone who might come in. His favourite romance might give him warmth and companionship; but he did not read. From where he sat he could throw a stone to where she was sitting perhaps; except for walls he could almost reach her with his voice, certainly see her. This was imbecile! A woman he had only met twice. Imbecile! . . .

"Point of five! Three queens—three knaves! Do you know that thing of Dowson's: 'I have been faithful to thee, Cynara, in my fashion'? Better than any Verlaine, except '*Les sanglots longs.*' What have you got?"

"Only quart to the queen. Do you like the name 'Cynara'?"

"Yes; don't you?"

"Cynara! Cynara! Ye-es—an autumn, rose-petal, whirling, dead-leaf sound."

"Good! Pipped. Shut up, Ossy—don't snore!"

"Ah, poor old dog! Let him. Shuffle for me, please. Oh! there goes another card!" Her knee touched his——! . . .

The book had dropped—Summerhay started.

Dash it! Hopeless! And, turning round in his huge armchair, he snoozed down into its depths. In a few minutes he was asleep. He slept without a dream.

Two hours later a friend, seeking distraction, came on him, and stood grinning down at that curly head and face which just then had the sleepy abandonment of a small boy's. Maliciously he gave the chair a little kick.

Summerhay stirred, and thought: 'What! Where am I?'

In front of the grinning face, above him, floated another filmy, charming. He shook himself. "Oh, damn you!"

"Sorry, old chap!"

"What time is it?"

"Ten o'clock."

Summerhay uttered an unintelligible sound, and turned over on the other arm. But he slept no more. Instead, he saw her face, heard her voice, and felt again the touch of her warm, gloved hand.

III

At the opera, on Friday evening, they were playing "Cavalleria" and "Pagliacci," which, with "Faust" and "Carmen," were the only operas Winton could not sleep through.

Women's eyes, which must not stare, cover more space than the eyes of men. Gyp had seen Summerhay before he saw her; seen him come in and fold his opera hat against his white waistcoat, looking round, as if for—someone. He looked well in evening clothes. When he sat down, she could still see his profile; and, vaguely watching the Santuzza and the stout Turiddu, she wondered whether, by fixing her eyes on it, she could make him turn. Just then he saw her. It was rather startling to find, after that exchange of looks, that she at once began to want another. Would he like her dress? Was her hair nice? She wished she had not had it washed that morning. But at the interval she did not look round, till his voice said:

"How d'you do, Major Winton?"

Winton had been told of the meeting in the train. He was pining for a cigarette, but had not liked to desert his daughter. After a few remarks, he got up.

"Take my seat a minute, Summerhay, I'm going to have a smoke."

Summerhay sat down. To Gyp it was, queerly, as if house and people vanished, and they two were back again in the railway carriage—alone. Ten minutes to make the most of! To enjoy the look in his eyes, the sound of his voice and laugh. To laugh, and be nice to him. They were friends.

"There's a picture in the National Gallery I want you to look at," she said, as he was leaving her.

"Will you take me? To-morrow? What time? Three?"

She knew she was flushing, and, with that warmth in her cheeks and a smile in her eyes, had the sensation, so rare and pleasant, of feeling beautiful. Then he was gone! Her father was slipping back into his stall; and, afraid of her face, she touched his arm:

"Dad, do look at that headdress in the next row but one; did you ever see anything so delicious?"

And while Winton was gazing, the orchestra struck up the

overture to "Pagliacci." Watching the progress of that heart-breaking little plot, she felt as if for the first time she understood it with other than her æsthetic sense. Poor Nedda! Poor Canio! Poor Silvio! Her eyes filled with tears. Within those doubled figures of the tragi-comedy she seemed to feel that passionate love—too swift, too strong, too violent, sweet and fearful.

"Thou hast my heart, and I am thine for ever—
To-night and for ever I am thine!
What is there left to me? What have I but a heart that is broken?"

La commedia é finita!

While putting on her cloak, her eyes sought Summerhay's. She tried to smile—could not, slowly forced her gaze away, and turned to follow Winton.

She was not late by coquetry, she was afraid of letting him think her eager. She saw him at once under the colonnade, and marked the change in his face when he caught sight of her. She led him straight up to the picture. Its likeness to him was not improved by a top hat and modern collar, but it was there still.

"Well!"

"What are you smiling at?"

"I've had a photograph of that ever since I was fifteen; so you see I've known you a long time."

He stared.

"Great Scott! Am I like that? I shall try and find *you* now."

Gyp shook her head.

"There's my most favourite picture, 'The Death of Procris.' The wonder in the faun's face, Procris's closed eyes; the dog, and the swans, and the pity for what might have been!"

"For what might have been! Did you enjoy 'Pagliacci'?"

"I think I felt it too much."

"I thought so. I watched you."

"Destruction by—love—seems so terrible! Show me your favourites. I can tell you what they are, though."

"Well?"

"The 'Admiral,' for one."

"Yes. What others?"

"The two Bellinis."

"By Jove, you *are* uncanny!"

Gyp laughed.

"You want decision, clarity, colour, and fine texture. Is that right? Here's another of *my* pets."

It was a tiny "Crucifixion" by da Messina—a thin high cross, a thin, humble, suffering Christ, lonely, and actual in the clear, darkened landscape.

"That touches me more than the big, idealised sort. One feels it *was* like that. Oh! And the Francescas! Aren't they lovely?"

He nodded, but his eyes said: 'And so are you.'

They spent two hours among those endless pictures, almost as alone as in the railway-carriage. And when she had refused to let him walk back with her, he stood stock-still beneath the colonnade. The sun streamed in under; the pigeons preened their feathers; people passed in the square, black and tiny against the lions and the great column. He took in nothing of all that. She was like no one he had ever known! Different from girls and women in society! Still more different from anything in the half-world! Not the new sort—college, suffrage! Like no one! And he knew so little of her! Not even whether she had ever really been in love. Her husband—where was he; what was he to her? "The rare, the mute, the inexpressive She!" When she smiled; when her eyes—but her eyes were too quick for him see right into them! How beautiful she had looked, gazing at the pictures, her lips just smiling! If he could kiss them! With a sigh, he moved down the grey steps into the sunlight. And London, throbbing with the season's life, seemed to him quite empty. To-morrow—ah, to-morrow he could call!

IV

After that Sunday call, Gyp sat by a bowl of heliotrope, thinking over a passage of words. . . .

"Mrs. Fiorsen, tell me about yourself."

"What do you want to know?"

"Your marriage?"

"I made a fearful mistake—against my father's wish. I haven't seen my husband for months; I shall never see him again if I can help it. Is that enough?"

"You don't love him?"

"No."

"Cant you get free?"

"The Divorce Court! Ugh! I couldn't!"

"Yes, I know—it's hellish!"

He had gripped her hand so hard! . . .

She buried her face in the heliotrope; then, going to the piano, began to play. She was still playing when her father came in. During these past nine months of his daughter's society, Winton had regained a measure of youthfulness, an extra touch of dandyism in his clothes, and in the gloss of his short hair.

"Mr. Summerhay's been here, Dad. He was sorry to miss you."

An appreciable pause.

"My dear, I doubt it."

She could never again be friends with a man without that pause! And conscious that her father was gazing at her, she said:

"Was it nice in the Park?"

"Thirty years ago they were all nobs and snobs; now God himself doesn't know what they are!"

"But the flowers?"

"Oh! Ah! and the birds—but, by Jove, the humans, Gyp! Tell me, what sort of fellow is young Summerhay?"

"Oh! very nice."

She could always read her father's thoughts quicker than he could read hers, and knew that he was struggling between the wish that she should have a good time and the desire to convey some kind of warning. With a sigh, he said:

"What does a young man's fancy turn to in summer, Gyp?"

Women, subtle and experienced, can impose restraint on would-be lovers. Gyp knew that a word from her would change everything; but she did not speak it. And yet she saw Summerhay most days—in the Row, at the opera, or at Bury Street. She had a habit of going to St. James's Park in the late afternoon and sitting by the water. One day he passed on his way home from chambers, and, after, they sat there together constantly. Why make her father uneasy by letting him come too often to Bury Street? It was pleasant, out there, talking calmly, while in front of them small ragged children fished and put the fishes into glass bottles, to eat, or watch on rainy days, as is the custom of man with the minor works of God.

When the seasons are about to change, the days pass, tranquil, waiting for the wind that brings in the new. Was it not natural to sit under the trees, by the flowers and the water, the pigeons and the ducks?

V

Summerhay did not wear his heart on his sleeve, and when, on the closing-day of term, he left his chambers to walk to that last meeting, his face was much as usual. But, in truth, he had come to a pretty pass. He had his own code. It was perhaps a trifle "old Georgian," but it forbade his distressing a woman. So far he had kept himself in hand; it had cost him more than he cared to reflect on. The only witness of his struggles was his old Scotch terrier, whose dreams he had disturbed night after night, tramping the long sitting-room of his little house. She must know what he was feeling, and, if she wanted his love, had but to raise her finger; and she had not raised it. When he touched her, when her dress disengaged its perfume or his eyes traced the slow, soft movement of her breathing, his head would go round, and to keep calm and friendly had been torture.

While he could see her almost every day, control had been just possible; now that he was about to lose her—for weeks—his heart felt sick within him. He had been hard put to it, too, before the world. A man passionately in love craves solitude, oscillating between fierce exercise and that trance-like stillness when he is busy conjuring up her face. He had managed to get through his work, had been grateful for it; but to his friends he had not given attention enough to prevent them saying: "What's up with Bryan Summerhay?" Always rather elusive in his movements, he was now too elusive altogether for those who had been accustomed to lunch, dine, dance, and sport with him. And yet he shunned his own company—going wherever anything distracted him, without demanding real attention. He had come unwillingly to discovery of his passion, which meant giving up so much. And yet he had never asked himself whether Gyp was worth loving. He wanted her exactly as she was; he did not weigh her in any sort of balance.

About her past he dismissed speculation. He had heard that she was Winton's natural daughter; it had only made him long to punch the head of the scandalmonger. Even her wretched marriage did not matter—nothing mattered except to be with her as much as she would let him. And now she was going

to the sea, and he himself to Perthshire to shoot grouse. A month!

Dared he speak? At times, her face was like a child's when it expects some harsh or frightening word. One could not hurt her! But once or twice he had caught a slow soft glance—gone as soon as seen.

Leaning on the river parapet, he watched the tide run down. The sun brightened its yellowish swirl and black eddies—water that had flowed under the willows past Eynsham, past Oxford, below the church at Clifton, past Moulsford, past Sonning. To have her to himself one day on the river—one whole long day! Why had he been so pusillanimous all this time? He passed his hand over his face, and it felt thin to him. If she only knew how he was longing, how he suffered! He turned away, toward Whitehall. He passed two men he knew, one of them just married. They, too, were off to Scotland for the twelfth. How stale and flat seemed that which till then had been the acme of the whole year to him! Ah, but if he had been going to Scotland *with her!*

He entered St. James's Park and passing along the water, making for their usual seat. And suddenly he saw that she was sitting there already. No more craning—he *would* speak!

She was wearing a maize-coloured muslin, and sat leaning back, her knees crossed, one hand resting on the knob of her furled sunshade, her face half hidden by a shady hat. Summerhay went straight up to her.

"Gyp! This can't go on! You know I worship you! If you can't love me, I've got to break away. Gyp, do you want me to go?"

She made a little movement, as if in protest, and answered very low:

"Of course I don't want you to go. How could I?"

"Then you *do* love me?"

"Wait, please. Wait a little longer. When we come back I'll tell you!"

"So long?"

"A month. It's not easy for me." She lifted her eyes to his. "Please not any more now."

That evening at his club, through the smoke of cigarette after cigarette, he saw her face as she had lifted it for that one second; and now he was in heaven, now in hell.

VI

The verandahed bungalow on the South Coast, built for an artist friend of Aunt Rosamund's, had a garden with one pine-tree which had strayed in advance of the wood behind. The house stood in solitude, above a low cliff whence the beach shelved in sandy ridges.

Looking from her bedroom at night, Gyp would get a feeling of being the only creature in the world. The crinkled, silvery sea, that lonely pine-tree, the cold moon, the sky dark cornflower blue, the hiss and sucking rustle of the surf over the beach pebbles, even the salt, chill air, seemed lonely. By day, too—in the hazy heat when the coarse sea-grass hardly quivered, and sea-birds passed close above the water with chuckle and cry—it all often seemed part of a dream. She bathed, and grew as tanned as her little daughter; but she would feel a kind of resentment against all the happy life round her these summer days—the sea-birds, the sunlight, and the waves; the white sails far out; the calm sun-steeped pine-trees; her baby, tumbling and smiling and softly twittering; and Betty and the other servants—all this life that seemed so simple and untortured.

To the one post each day she looked forward terribly. And yet his letters, which began like hers: "My dear friend," might have been read by anyone—almost. Now that he was away from her, would he not feel that it was best to break, and forget her? He had everything before him; could he possibly go on wanting one who had nothing before her? Some blue-eyed girl with auburn hair—that type so superior to her own—would sweep him from her! What then? No worse than it used to be? Ah, so much worse that she dared not think of it!

Then, for five days, no letter came. And she felt a growing ache of longing and jealousy, utterly unlike the mere outraged pride with which she had caught sight of Fiorsen and Daphne Wing in the music-room—so long, it seemed, ago. When on the fifth day the postman left nothing but a bill for little Gyp's shoes, and a note from Aunt Rosamund at Harrogate, where she had gone with Winton for the annual cure, Gyp's heart sank to the depths. Was this the end? With a blind, numb feeling, she wandered out into the wood.

She went along till she could see no outer world for the grey-brown tree-stems streaked with gum-resin; and, throwing herself down on her face, dug her elbows deep into the pine-dust. Tears, rare with her, forced their way up. But crying only made her ill. She turned over on her back and lay motionless. Silent here, even at noon! The sough of the calm sea could not reach so far; the flies were few; no birds sang. The tall bare pine-stems rose like columns in a temple roofed with dark boughs and sky. Cloud-fleeces drifted over the blue. There should be peace—but in her heart was none!

A dusky shape came padding through the trees, another—two donkeys loose from somewhere; they stood licking each other's necks and noses. Humble beasts, friendly, they made her feel ashamed. Why should she be sorry for herself, who had everything in life she wanted—except the love she had thought she would never want? Ah, but she wanted it now, wanted it at last with all her being!

With a shudder she sprang up; the ants had got to her, and she had to pick them off her neck and dress. She wandered back towards the beach. If he had truly found someone to fill his thoughts and drive her out, she would never, by word or sign, show him that she missed and wanted him—never! She would sooner die!

She came out into the sunshine. It was low tide; and the wet foreshore gleamed with opal tints; there were wandering tracks on the sea, as of serpents writhing beneath the surface; and away to the west the archwayed, tawny rock which cut the line of coast was like a dream-shape. All was dreamy. And, suddenly her heart began beating to suffocation. On the edge of the low cliff, by the side of the path, Summerhay was sitting!

He got up and came towards her. She said calmly:

"Yes; it's me. Did you ever see such a gipsified object? I thought you were still in Scotland. How's Ossy?" Then her self-possession failed.

"It's no good, Gyp. I must know."

It seemed that her heart had given up beating; but she said quietly: "Let's sit down a minute," moving down under the cliff bank where they could not be seen from the house. Drawing the coarse grass-blades through her fingers, she said:

"I didn't try to make you. I never tried."

"No; never."

"It's wrong."

"Who cares? No one could care who loves as I do. Oh, Gyp, can't you love me? I know I'm nothing much. But it's eleven weeks to-day since we met in the train, and I don't think I've had one minute's let-up since."

Gyp sighed.

"Then what is to be done? Look over there—that bit of blue in the grass is my baby daughter. There's here—and my father—and—I'm afraid—afraid of love, Bryan!"

At the first use of his name, Summerhay seized her hand.

"Afraid—how—afraid?"

Gyp said very low:

"I might love you too much. Don't say any more now. No; don't! Let's go in and have lunch." And she got up.

He stayed till tea-time, and not a word more of love did he speak. But when he was gone, she sat under the pine-tree with little Gyp on her lap. Love! If her mother had checked love, she herself would never have been born. The midges were biting before she went in. After watching Betty give little Gyp her bath, she crossed the passage to her bedroom and leaned out of the window. Could it have been to-day she had lain on the ground with tears of despair running down her cheeks? Away to the left of the pine-tree, the moon had floated up, barely visible in the paling sky. A new world, an enchanted garden!

That evening she sat with a book on her lap, not reading; and in her went on the strange revolution of first love—the sinking of "I" into "Thou," the passionate subjection, the intense, unconscious giving-up of will, in preparation for completer union.

She slept without dreaming, awoke heavy and oppressed. Too languid to bathe, she sat listless on the beach with little Gyp all the morning. Had she energy or spirit to meet him in the afternoon by the rock archway, as she had promised? For the first time since she was a small and naughty child, she avoided the eyes of Betty, afraid of her knowing too much. After early tea, she started out; if she did not, he would come, and she did not want the servants to see him two days running.

This last day of August had a warm and still beneficence—the corn all gathered in, the apples mellowing, robins singing already, a few slumberous, soft clouds, a pale blue sky, a smiling sea. She went inland, across the stream. No pines grew on that side, where the soil was richer—of a ruddy brown. In the second crops of clover, already high, bumble-bees were hard at

work; and the white-throated swallows dipped and soared. Gyp gathered a bunch of chicory flowers. She was close above the shore before she saw him standing in the rock archway below, looking for her across the beach. Away from the hum of bees and flies, it was very quiet here—only the faint hiss of tiny waves. He had not yet heard her coming, and the thought flashed through her: 'If I take another step, it is for ever!' She stood, scarcely breathing, the chicory flowers held before her lips. Then she heard him sigh, and, moving quickly forward, said:

"Here I am."

He seized her hand, and, without a word, they passed through the archway. They walked on the hard sand, side by side, scrambled up the low cliff and went along the grassy top to a gate into a stubble-field. He held it open for her, but, as she passed, caught her in his arms and kissed her lips. To her, who had been kissed a thousand times, it was the first kiss. Deadly pale, she fell back from him against the gate; then, her lips still quivering, with eyes very dark, she looked at him distraught. And suddenly turning round to the gate, she buried her face on her arms. A sob came up in her throat which seemed to tear her to bits; she cried as if her heart would break. His timid despairing touches, his voice close to her ear, imploring, were not of the least avail, she could not stop. That kiss had broken down a barrier in her soul, swept away her life up to that moment, done something terrible and wonderful. At last, she struggled out:

"I'm sorry—so sorry! Don't—don't look at me! Go away a little, and I'll—I'll be all right."

He obeyed without a word, and, passing through the gate, sat down on the cliff with his back to her, looking out over the sea.

Gripping the wood of the old grey gate till it hurt her hands, Gyp gazed at the butterflies chasing in the sunlight towards the crinkly foam edging to the quiet sea till they were but white specks out in the blue.

But she was no nearer to feeling that she could trust herself. What had happened in her was too violent, too sweet, too terrifying. And she said:

"Let me go home now by myself. To-morrow!"

"Whatever you wish, Gyp—always!"

He pressed her hand against his cheek, then, folding his arms

tight, resumed his stare at the sea. Gyp did not go in for a long time, sitting in the pine-wood till evening gathered and stars crept out in a sky of that mauve-blue which the psychic say is the soul-garment colour of the good.

Late that night, when she had finished brushing her hair, she opened her window and stepped out on to the verandah. Not a sound from the sleeping house—not a breath of wind! Her face, her hands, her body, felt as if on fire. The moon was filling every cranny of her brain with a wakefulness. The shiver of the surfless sea on a rising tide, rose, fell, rose, fell. The sand cliff shone like a bank of snow. All was inhabited, as a moonlit night is wont to be. A big moth went past her face. A little night beast somewhere was scrattling in the sand. Suddenly the shadow of the pine-trunk moved—moved—ever so little! There, joined to the trunk, Summerhay was standing, his face just visible against the stem, the moonlight on one cheek, a hand shading his eyes. He held it out in supplication. Gyp did not stir, looking straight at that beseeching figure. Then, with a feeling she had never known, she saw him coming. He stood looking up at her. She could see all the workings of his face—passion, reverence, amazement; heard his awed whisper:

"Is it you, Gyp? Really you? You look so young!"

VII

From the moment of surrender, Gyp passed into a state the more enchanted because she had never believed in it, never thought she could love as she now loved. Days and nights went by in a sort of dream. Just as she had never felt it possible to admit the world into the secrets of her married life, so now she did not consider the world at all. But the thought of her father weighed on her conscience. He was back in town. And she felt that she must tell him.

Two days before her month at the bungalow was up, she went, leaving Betty and little Gyp to follow on the last day. Winton, pale from his cure, found her when he came in from the club. She had put on evening dress, and above the pallor of her shoulders, her sun-warmed face and throat had almost the colour of a nectarine. He had never seen her look like that, nor her eyes so full of light. And he uttered a quiet grunt of satisfaction. It was as if a flower, which he had last seen in close and elegant shape, had bloomed in full perfection. She did not meet his gaze quite steadily and all that evening kept putting her confession off. It was not easy—far from easy. At last, when he was smoking his "go-to-bed" cigarette, she sank down beside his chair, leaning against his knee, where her face was hidden, as on that day after her first ball, when she had listened to *his* confession.

"Dad, do you remember my saying once that I didn't understand what you and my mother felt for each other?" Winton did not speak. Gyp went on: "I know now how one would rather die than give someone up."

"Whom? Summerhay?"

"Yes; I used to think I should never be in love, but you knew better."

Better!

In disconsolate silence, he thought rapidly: 'What's to be done? What can I do? Get her a divorce?'

Because of the ring in her voice, or the sheer seriousness of the position, he did not resent it, as when he lost her to Fiorsen. Love! A passion such as had overtaken her mother and himself! For this young man? A decent fellow, a good rider—compre-

hensible! If the course had only been clear! He put his hand on her shoulder and said:

"Well, Gyp, we must go for the divorce, then, after all."

"It's too late. Let *him* divorce me, if he only will!"

Too late? Already! Sudden recollection, that he had not the right, alone kept him silent. Gyp went on:

"I love him, with every bit of me. I don't care what comes—open or secret. I don't care what anybody thinks."

She had turned round to him. This was a Gyp he had never seen! Glowing, soft, quick-breathing, with just that lithe watchful look of the mother cat or lioness whose whelps are threatened. He remembered how, as a child, with face very tense, she would ride at fences that were too big. At last he said:

"I'm sorry you didn't tell me sooner."

"I couldn't. I didn't know. Oh, Dad, I'm always hurting you! Forgive me!"

She was pressing his hand to her cheek that felt burning hot. And he thought: 'Forgive! Of course I forgive. That's not the point; the point is——'

A vision beset him of his loved one talked about, bandied from mouth to mouth, or else—for her what there had been for him, a hole-and-corner life, an underground existence of stealthy meetings kept dark, above all from her own little daughter. Ah, not that! And yet—was not even that better than tongues wagging, eyes winking or uplifted in righteousness? Summerhay's world was more or less his world; and scandal, which—like all parasitic growths—flourishes in enclosed spaces, would have every chance. His brain began to search, steely and quick, for some way out; and the expression as when a fox broke covert came on his face.

"Nobody knows, Gyp?"

"Nobody."

That was something! With an irritation that rose from his very soul, he muttered:

"I can't stand it that you should suffer, and that fellow Fiorsen go scot-free. Can you give up seeing Summerhay while we get you a divorce? We might do it, if no one knows. I think you owe it to me, Gyp."

Gyp got up and stood by the window a long time without answering. Winton watched her face. At last she said:

"I couldn't. We might stop seeing each other; it isn't that. It's what I should feel. I shouldn't respect myself after. Oh,

Dad, don't you see? He really loved me in his way. And to pretend! To make out a case for myself, tell about Daphne Wing, about his drinking, and baby; pretend that I wanted him to love me, when I got to hate it and didn't care really whether he was faithful or not—and knowing all the while that I've been everything to someone else! I'd much rather let him know, and ask him to divorce me."

Winton replied:

"And suppose he won't?"

"Then my mind would be clear, anyway; and we would take what we could."

"And little Gyp?"

Staring before her as if trying to see into the future, she said slowly:

"Some day she'll understand. Or perhaps it will be all over before she knows. Does happiness ever last?"

She bent over, kissed his forehead, and went out. The warmth from her lips, and the scent of her, remained with Winton as if wafted from the past.

Was there then nothing to be done? Men of his stamp do not, as a rule, see very deep even into those who are nearest to them; but to-night he saw his daughter's nature more fully than ever before. No use to importune her to act against her instincts! And yet—to sit and watch it all—watch his own passion with its ecstasy and its heart-burnings re-enacted in her—perhaps for many years? The old vulgar saying passed through his mind: "What's bred in the bone will come out in the meat." Now she had given, she would give with both hands—beyond measure—beyond!—as he himself, as her mother had given! Ah, well, she was better off than his own loved one had been. One must not go ahead of trouble, or cry over spilled milk!

VIII

Gyp lay wakeful. The question of telling Fiorsen kept her thoughts in turmoil. Was he likely to divorce her if she did? His contempt for what he called "these *bourgeois* morals," his instability, the very unpleasantness, and offence to his vanity—all would prevent him. No; he would not divorce her, she was sure, unless by chance he wanted legal freedom, which was so unlikely. What then would be gained? Had she any right to ease her conscience if it brought harm to her lover—conscience, too, in regard to one who, within a year of marriage, had taken to himself a mistress, and not even spared the home paid for and supported by his wife? No; if she told Fiorsen, it would only be to salve her pride, wounded by doing what she did not avow.

She came down to breakfast, no whit advanced towards decision. Neither of them mentioned their last night's talk, and Gyp went back to her room to busy herself with dress, after those weeks away. It was past noon when, at a muffled knock, she found Markey outside her door.

"Excuse me, m'm."

Gyp beckoned him in. Markey closed the door.

"Mr. Fiorsen—in the hall, m'm—slipped in when I answered the bell; short of shoving, I couldn't keep him out."

"Is my father in?"

"No, m'm; the major's gone to the fencin'-club."

"What did you say?"

"Said I would see. So far as I was aware, nobody was in. Shall I have a try to shift him, m'm?"

Gyp shook her head.

"Say no one can see him."

Markey's woodcock eyes, under their thin, dark, twisting brows, fastened on her dolefully; he opened the door to go. Fiorsen was standing there, and, with a quick movement, came in. She saw Markey raise his arms as if to catch him round the waist, and said quietly:

"Markey—wait outside, please."

When the door was shut, she retreated against her dressing

table and stood gazing at her husband; her heart throbbed as if it would leap through its coverings.

He had grown a short beard, his cheeks seemed a little fatter, and his eyes surely more green; otherwise, he looked much as she remembered him. And her first thought was: 'Why did I ever pity him? He'll never fret or drink himself to death—he's got enough vitality for twenty men.'

The fixed nervous smile on his face passed; his eyes roved round the room in the old half-fierce, half-futile way.

"Well, Gyp," he said, and his voice shook a little: "At last! Won't you kiss me?"

How idiotic! Suddenly she felt quite cool.

"If you want to speak to my father—he's out."

Fiorsen gave one of his fierce shrugs.

"Look, Gyp! I returned from Russia yesterday. I made a lot of money out there. Come back to me! I will be good—I swear it! Ah, Gyp, come back to me, and see how good I will be! I will take you abroad, you and the *bambina*. We will go to Rome—anywhere you like—live how you like. Only come back to me!"

Gyp answered stonily:

"You are talking nonsense."

"Gyp, I swear I have not sen a woman fit to put beside you. Be good to me once more. This time I will not fail. Try me! Try me!"

At his tragic tones, which seemed to her both false and childish, Gyp realised the strength of the new feeling in her heart. And the more that feeling throbbed within her, the harder her face and her voice grew.

"If that is all you came to say—please go. I will never come back to you. Once for all, understand, *please*."

His silence impressed her far more than his appeal; with one of his stealthy movements he came quite close, and putting his face forward till it almost touched her, said:

"You are my wife. I want you back. I must have you. If you don't come, I will kill myself, or you."

And suddenly his arms, knotted behind her back, crushed her to him. She stifled a scream; then, very swiftly, took a resolve, and, rigid in his arms, said:

"Let go; you hurt me. Sit down quietly. I will tell you something."

The tone of her voice made him loosen his grasp and crane

back to see her face. Gyp detached his arms, sat down on an old oak chest, and motioned him to the window-seat. Her heart thumped pitifully; waves of almost physical sickness passed through and through her. She had smelt brandy in his breath when he was close to her. It was like being in the cage of a wild beast; it was like being with a madman! The remembrance of his fingers stretched out like claws above her baby was so vivid at that moment, that she could scarcely see him, sitting there, waiting for what she was going to say. Fixing her eyes on him, she said softly:

"You say you love me, Gustav. I tried to love you, too, but I never could—never from the first. I tried very hard. Surely you care what a woman feels, even if she happens to be your wife?"

She saw his face quiver, and went on:

"When I found I couldn't love you, I felt I had no right over you. I didn't stand on my rights, did I?"

Again his face quivered, and again she hurried on:

"But you wouldn't expect me to go all through my life without ever feeling love—you who've felt it so many times?" Then, clasping her hands tight, with wonder at herself, she murmured: "I *am* in love. I have given myself."

He made a queer, whining sound, covering his face. The beggar's tag: "'Ave a feelin' 'eart, gentleman—'ave a feelin' 'eart!" passed through Gyp's mind. Would he get up and strangle her? Should she dash to the door—call out? For a long, miserable moment she watched him swaying on the window-seat, with his face covered. Then, without looking at her, he crammed a clenched hand up against his mouth, and rushed from the room.

Through the open door Gyp had a glimpse of Markey's motionless figure, coming to life as Fiorsen passed. She locked the door, and lay down on her bed. Her heart beat dreadfully. If on this shock he began to drink, what might not happen? He had said something wild. But what right had he to feel jealous rage against her? What right? She went to the glass, trembling, and mechanically tidied her hair. Miraculous that she had come through unscathed!

Summerhay was to meet her at three o'clock by the seat in St. James's Park. But all was different, now; difficult and dangerous! She must wait, take counsel with her father. Yet, if she did not keep that tryst, he would be anxious—thinking

of what had happened to her; thinking, perhaps—oh, foolish!—that she had forgotten, or even repented of her love. What would she herself think, if he were to fail her at their first tryst after those days of bliss? That he had changed his mind, seen she was not worth it, seen that to a woman who could give herself so soon, so easily, he could not sacrifice his life.

In this cruel uncertainty she spent the next two hours, till it was nearly three. If she did not go, he would come on to Bury Street, which would be still more dangerous. She put on her hat and walked swiftly towards St. James's Palace. Once sure that she was not being followed, her courage rose. She was ten minutes late, and saw him walking up and down, turning his head every few seconds so as not to lose sight of the bench. When they had greeted with that pathetic casualness of lovers which deceives so few, they walked on together into the Green Park, beneath the trees. She told him about her father; but only when his hand was holding hers under cover of the sun-shade that lay across her knee, did she speak of Fiorsen.

He dropped her hand, and said:

"Did he touch you, Gyp?"

Gyp heard that question with a shock. Touch her! Yes!

He made a shuddering sound. His hands and teeth were clenched. She said softly:

"Bryan! Don't! I wouldn't let him kiss me."

He seemed to have to force his eyes to look at her.

"It's all right."

She sat motionless, cut to the heart. She was soiled, and spoiled for him! Of course! But her heart had never been touched; it was his utterly. Not enough for a man—he wanted an untouched body, too. That she could not give; he should have thought of that sooner, instead of only now. And, miserably, she stared before her.

A little boy came and stood still in front of them, with round, unmoving eyes. He had a slice of bread and jam in his hand, and his mouth and cheeks were smeared with red. A woman called: "Jackey! Come on, now!" He was hauled away, still looking back, holding out his bread and jam as though offering her a bite. Summerhay's arm slipped round her.

"It's over, darling. Never again—I promise you!"

Ah, he might promise—might even keep that promise. But he would suffer, always suffer, thinking of that other. And she said:

"You can only have me as I am, Bryan. I can't make myself new for you; I wish I could—oh, I wish I could!"

"Don't think of it! Come home to me and have tea—there's no one there. Come!"

He took her hands. And all else left Gyp but the joy of being close to him.

IX

Passing Markey like a blind man, Fiorsen made his way into the street: he had not gone a hundred yards before he was hurrying back. He had left his hat. The servant, still standing there, handed him that wide-brimmed object and closed the door in his face. He went towards Piccadilly. But for the expression on Gyp's face, what might he not have done? Mixed with sickening jealousy, he felt relief, as if he had been saved from something horrible. So she had never loved him! Never at all? Impossible that a woman on whom he had lavished such passion should never have felt any in return! Images of her passed before him—surrendering, surrendering. It could not all have been pretence! He was not a common man—he had charm—or, other women thought so! She had lied; she must have lied!

He went into a café and asked for a *fine champagne.* They brought him a carafe, with the measures marked. He sat there a long time. When he rose, he had drunk nine, and felt a kind of ferocity pleasant in his veins, a kind of nobility pleasant in his soul. Let her love! But let him get his fingers on her lover's throat! He stopped in his tracks. There on a sandwich-board in front of him were the words: "Daphne Wing. Pantheon. Daphne Wing. Plastic Danseuse. Poetry of Motion. To-day at three o'clock. Pantheon. Daphne Wing."

She had loved him—little Daphne! It was past three. Going in, he took his place in the stalls, close to the stage, with bitter amusement. This was irony indeed! Here she came! A Pierrette—in short, diaphanous muslin, her face whitened to match it; a Pierrette who stood slowly spinning on her toes, with arms raised and hands joined in an arch above her glistening hair.

An idiotic pose! But there was the old expression on her face, limpid, dovelike. And that something divine about her dancing smote Fiorsen through all the imbecility of her posturings. Across and across she flitted, pirouetting, and caught up at intervals by a Pierrot in black tights with a face as whitened as her own, held upside down, or right end up with one knee bent sideways, and the toe of a foot pressed against the ankle of the other, and arms arched above her. Then, with

Pierrot's hands grasping her waist, she would stand upon one toe and slowly twiddle, lifting her other leg towards the roof, while the trembling of her form manifested to all how hard it was; then, off the toe, she capered out to the wings and capered back, wearing on her face that lost, dovelike look, while her perfect legs gleamed white. On the stage she was adorable! Raising his hands high, Fiorsen clapped and called out: "*Brava!*" He marked the sudden roundness in her eyes, a tiny start—no more. She had seen him. 'Some don't forget me!' he thought.

She came on for her second dance, assisted this time by her own image reflected in a little weedy pool about the middle of the stage. "Ophelia's last dance." Fiorsen grinned. In a clinging sea-green gown, cut here and there to show her inevitable legs, with marguerites and cornflowers in her unbound hair, she circled her own reflection, languid, pale, desolate; then slowly gaining the abandon needful to full display, danced with frenzy till, in a gleam of limelight, she sank into the apparent water and floated among paper water-lilies on her back. Lovely she looked there, with her eyes still open, her lips parted, her hair trailing behind. Again Fiorsen raised his hands high to clap, again called out: "*Brava!*" The curtain fell, and Ophelia did not take her call. Was it the sight of him, or was she preserving the illusion that she was drowned? That "arty" touch would be just like her.

With an audible "Pish!" at the two comedians in calico, beating each other about the body, he rose, and made his way out. He scribbled on a card, "Will you see me?—G. F." and took it round to the stage-door. The answer came back:

"Miss Wing will see you in a minute, sir."

Leaning against the distempered wall of the draughty corridor, Fiorsen wondered why the devil he was there, what the devil she would say.

She was standing with her hat on, while her "dresser" buttoned her patent-leather shoes. Holding out her hand over the woman's back, she said:

"Oh, Mr. Fiorsen, how do you do?"

Fiorsen took the little moist hand; his eyes passed over her, avoiding a direct meeting with her eyes. Her face was the same, yet not the same—harder, more self-possessed; only her perfect supple little body was as it had been. The dresser murmured: "Good afternoon, miss," and went.

Daphne Wing smiled faintly.

"I haven't seen you for a long time, have I?"

"No; I've been abroad. You dance as beautifully as ever."

"Oh, yes; it hasn't hurt my dancing."

With an effort, he looked her in the face. Was this really the same girl who had clung to him, cloyed him with her kisses, her tears, her appeals for love—just a little love? Ah, but she was more desirable, much more desirable than he had remembered! And he said:

"Give me a kiss, little Daphne!"

Daphne Wing did not stir; her white teeth rested on her lower lip; she said:

"Oh, no, thank you! How is Mrs. Fiorsen?"

Fiorsen turned abruptly:

"There is none."

"Oh, has she divorced you?"

"No. Stop talking of her; stop talking, I say!"

Daphne Wing, still motionless in the centre of her little crowded dressing-room, said, in a matter-of-fact voice:

"You are polite, aren't you? It's funny; I can't tell whether I'm glad to see you. I had a bad time, you know; and Mrs. Fiorsen was an angel. Why do you come to see me now?"

Exactly! Why had he come? The thought flashed through him: 'She'll help me to forget.' And he said:

"I was a great brute to you, Daphne. I came to make up."

"Oh, no; you can't make up—thank you!" She began drawing on her gloves. "You taught me a lot, you know. I ought to be quite grateful. Oh, you've grown a little beard! D'you think that improves you? It makes you look rather like Mephistopheles, I think."

Fiorsen stared fixedly at that perfectly shaped face, where a faint, underdone pink mingled with the fairness of the skin. Was she mocking him? She—so matter-of-fact!

"Where do you live now?" he said.

"I'm on my own, in a studio. You can come and see it, if you like. Only you'd better understand. I've had enough of love."

Fiorsen grinned.

"Even for another?" he said.

Daphne Wing answered calmly:

"I wish you would treat me like a lady."

Fiorsen bit his lip.

"May I have the pleasure of giving you some tea?"

"Yes, thank you; I'm very hungry. I don't eat lunch on matinée days; I find it better not. Do you like my Ophelia dance?"

"Artificial."

"Yes—it's done with mirrors and wire netting, you know. But do I give you the illusion of being mad?" Fiorsen nodded. "I'm so glad. Shall we go? I do want my tea."

She turned round, scrutinised herself in the glass, touched her hat with both hands, revealing, for a second, all the poised beauty of her figure, took a little bag from the back of a chair, and said:

"I think, if you don't mind going on, it's less conspicuous. I'll meet you at Ruffel's—they have lovely things there. *Au revoir.*"

Bewildered, irritated, queerly meek, Fiorsen passed down Coventry Street, and entering the empty Ruffel's, took a table near the window. A sudden vision of Gyp sitting on that oaken chest, at the foot of her bed, blotted the girl clean out, till, looking up, he saw Daphne Wing outside, gazing at the cakes in the window. She came in.

"Oh, here you are! I should like iced coffee and walnut cake, and some of those marzipan sweets—oh, and some whipped cream with my cake. Do you mind?" And, sitting down, she fixed her eyes on his face.

"Where have you been abroad?"

"Stockholm, Budapest, Moscow, other places."

"How perfect! Do you think I should make a success in Budapest or Moscow?"

"You might; you are English enough."

"Oh! Do you think I'm very English?"

"Utterly. Your kind of——" He was not quite capable of adding—'your kind of vulgarity could not be produced anywhere else.'

"My kind of beauty?"

Fiorsen grinned and nodded.

"Oh, I think that's the nicest thing you ever said to me! Only, of course, I should like to think I'm more of the Greek type—pagan, you know."

Her profile at that moment, against the light, was very pure and soft in line. And he said:

"I suppose you hate me, little Daphne? You ought to hate me."

Daphne Wing's round, blue-grey eyes passed over him much as they had been passing over the marzipan.

"No; I don't hate you—now. Of course, if I had any love left for you, I should. Oh, isn't that Irish? But one can think anybody a rotter without hating them, can't one?"

"So you think me a 'rotter'?"

"But aren't you? You couldn't be anything else—could you?—with the sort of things you did."

"And yet you don't mind having tea with me?"

Daphne Wing, who had begun to eat, said with her mouth full:

"You see, I'm independent now, and I know life. That makes you harmless."

Fiorsen stretched out his hand and seized hers just where her little warm pulse was beating very steadily. She looked at it, changed her fork over, and went on eating with the other hand. Fiorsen drew his away as if he had been stung.

"You *have* changed—that is certain!"

"Yes; you wouldn't expect anything else, would you? You see, one doesn't go through that for nothing. I think I was a dreadful little fool——" She stopped, with her spoon on its way to her mouth—"and yet——"

"I love you still, little Daphne."

A faint sigh escaped her.

"Once I would have given a lot to hear that."

And, turning her head away, she picked a large walnut out of her cake and put it in her mouth.

"Are you coming to see my studio? I've got it rather nice and new. I'm making twenty-five a week; my next engagement, I'm going to get thirty. I should like Mrs. Fiorsen to know—— Oh, I forgot; you don't like me to speak of her! Why not? I wish you'd tell me!" Gazing at his furious face, she went on: "I'm not a bit afraid of you now. I used to be. Oh, how is Count Rosek? Is he as pale as ever? Aren't you going to have anything more? You've had hardly anything. D'you know what I should like—a chocolate éclair and a raspberry ice-cream soda with a slice of tangerine in it."

When she had slowly sucked up that beverage, prodding the slice of tangerine with her straws, they went out and took a cab. On that journey to her studio, Fiorsen tried to possess

himself of her hand, but, folding her arms across her chest, she said quietly:

"It's very bad manners to take advantage of cabs." Withdrawing sullenly, he watched her askance. Was she playing with him? Or had she really ceased to care the snap of a finger? It seemed incredible. The cab, which had been threading the maze of Soho streets, stopped. Daphne Wing alighted, proceeded down a narrow passage to a green door on the right, and, opening it with a latch-key, paused to say:

"I like its being in a little sordid street—it takes away all amateurishness. It wasn't a studio, of course; it was the back part of a paper-maker's. Any space conquered for art is something, isn't it?" She led the way up a few green-carpeted stairs, into a large room with a skylight, whose walls were covered in Japanese silk the colour of yellow azaleas. Here she stood for a minute without speaking, as though lost in the beauty of her home; then, pointing to the walls, she said:

"It took me ages, I did it all myself. And look at my little Japanese trees; aren't they dickies?" Six little dark abortions of trees were arranged scrupulously on a lofty window-sill, whence the skylight sloped. She added suddenly: "I think Count Rosek would like this room. There's something bizarre about it, isn't there? I wanted to surround myself with that, you know—to get the bizarre note into my work. It's so important nowadays. But through there I've got a bedroom and a bathroom and a little kitchen with everything to hand, all quite domestic; and hot water always on. My people are *so* funny about this room. They come sometimes, and stand about. But they can't get used to the neighbourhood; of course it *is* sordid, but I think an artist ought to be superior to that."

Suddenly touched, Fiorsen answered:

"Yes, little Daphne."

She looked at him, and another tiny sigh escaped her.

"Why did you treat me like you did?" she said. "It's such a pity, because now I can't feel anything at all." And she suddenly passed the back of her hand across her eyes. Really moved, Fiorsen went towards her, but she put out her hand to keep him off, with half a tear glistening on her eyelashes.

"Please sit down on the divan. Will you smoke? These are Russians." And she took a white box of pink-coloured cigarettes from a little golden birchwood table. "I have everything Russian and Japanese; I think they help more than anything

with atmosphere. I've got a balalaika; you can't play on it, can you? What a pity! If only I had a violin! I *should* have liked to hear you play again." She clasped her hands: "Do you remember when I danced to you before the fire?"

Fiorsen remembered very well. The pink cigarette trembled in his fingers, and he said rather hoarsely:

"Dance to me now, Daphne!"

She shook her head.

"I don't trust you a yard. Nobody would—would they?"

Fiorsen started up.

"Then why did you ask me here? What are you playing at, you little——?" With round, unmoving eyes, she said calmly:

"I thought you'd like to see that I'd got over it—that's all. But, of course, if you don't, you needn't stop."

Fiorsen sank back on the divan. A conviction that everything she said was literal had begun slowly to sink into him. He puffed smoke out with a laugh.

"What are you laughing at?"

"I was only thinking that you are as great an egoist as I."

"I want to be. It's the only thing, isn't it?"

Fiorsen laughed again.

"You needn't worry. You always were."

She had seated herself on a stool, and answered gravely:

"I wasn't, while I loved you. But it didn't pay, did it?"

"It has made a woman of you, Daphne. Your face is different. Your mouth is prettier. All over, you are prettier." Pink came up in Daphne Wing's cheeks. Encouraged by that flush, he went on warmly: "If you loved me now, I should not tire of you. Oh, you can believe me! I——"

She shook her head.

"We won't talk about love, will we? Did you have a big triumph in Moscow and St. Petersburg? It must be wonderful to have really great triumphs!"

Fiorsen answered gloomily:

"I made a lot of money."

"Oh, I expect you're very happy."

Did she mean to be ironic?

"I'm miserable."

He got up and went towards her. She looked up in his face.

"I'm sorry if you're miserable. I know what it feels like."

"You can help me not to be. Little Daphne, you can help

me to forget." He had stopped, and put his hands on her shoulders. Without moving, she answered:

"I suppose it's Mrs. Fiorsen you want to forget?"

"As if she were dead. Let it all be as it was, Daphne! You have grown up; you are a woman now, an artist."

Daphne Wing had turned her head towards the stairs.

"That was the bell. Suppose it's my people? It's just their time! Oh, isn't that awkward?"

Fiorsen recoiled against the wall. With his head touching one of the little Japanese trees, he stood biting his fingers.

"My mother's got a key, and it's no good putting you anywhere, because she always has a good look round. But perhaps it isn't them. Besides, I'm not afraid now; it makes a wonderful difference being on one's own."

She disappeared. Fiorsen could hear a woman's acid voice, a man's, rather hoarse and greasy, the sound of a smacking kiss. He stood at bay. Trapped! The little dovelike devil! He saw a lady in a green silk dress, shot with beetroot colour, a short, thick gentleman with a round, greyish beard, in a grey suit, having a small dahlia in his buttonhole, and, behind them, Daphne Wing, flushed, and round-eyed. He took a step, intending to escape without more ado. The gentleman said:

"Introduce us, Daisy. I didn't catch—Mr. Dawson? How do you do, sir? One of my daughter's impresarios, I think. 'Appy to meet you, I'm sure."

Fiorsen bowed. Mr. Wagge's small piggy eyes fixed themselves on the dwarf trees.

"She's got a nice little place here for her work—quiet and unconventional. I hope you think well of her talent, sir? You might go further and fare worse, I believe."

Again Fiorsen bowed.

"You may be proud of her," he said; "she is the rising star."

Mr. Wagge cleared his throat.

"Ow," he said; "ye-es! From a little thing we thought she had stuff in her. I've come to take a great interest in her work. Not in my line, but she's a sticker, and I like to see perseverance. Where you've that, you've 'alf the battle of success. So many of these young people seem to think life's all play. You must see a lot of that in your profession, sir."

"Robert! The name was not Dawson."

A long moment. On the one side was that vinegary woman

poking her head forward like an angry hen; on the other, Daphne, her eyes round, her cheeks red, her hands clasped to her perfect breast; in the centre, a broad, grey-bearded figure, with reddening face, angry eyes, and hoarsening voice:

"You scoundrel! You infernal scoundrel!" It lurched, raising a pudgy fist. Fiorsen sprang down the stairs, wrenched open the door, and sped away.

X

That same evening, from the corner of Bury Street, Summerhay watched Gyp going swiftly to her father's house. Gone! The longing to have her always with him was growing fast. Since her husband knew—why wait? There would be no rest for either of them, with the menace of that fellow. She must come away with him abroad—till things had declared themselves; and then he would find a place where they could live and she feel safe and happy. For this he must set his affairs in order. And he thought: 'No good doing things by halves. Mother must know. The sooner the better!' With a grimace, he set out for his aunt's house in Cadogan Gardens, where his mother always stayed when in town.

Lady Summerhay was waiting for dinner and reading a book on dreams. A red-shaded lamp cast a mellow tinge over her grey frock, one reddish cheek and one white shoulder. Important, with blonde hair just turning grey, she had married young and been a widow fifteen years—a naturally free spirit netted by association with people of public position. Bubbles were still rising from her submerged soul that would not again set eyes on the horizon. Neither narrow nor illiberal, as people in society go, she judged everything now as those of public position must—discussion, of course, but no alteration in one's way of living. The countless movements in which she and her friends were interested for the emancipation and the benefit of others, were, in fact, only conduit-pipes for letting off superfluous goodwill and the directing spirit bred in her. She acted in terms of the public good, regulated by what people of position said at lunch and dinner. It was not her fault that such people lunched and dined. When her son kissed her, she held up the book, and said:

"I think this man's book disgraceful; he runs his sex-idea to death. We aren't all so obsessed as that. He ought to be put in his own lunatic asylum."

Summerhay answered:

"I've got bad news for you, Mother."

Lady Summerhay searched his face apprehensively. She

knew that expression, that poise of his head, as if butting. He looked like that when he came to her in gambling scrapes.

"The people at Mildenham, Major Winton and his daughter —I'm in love with her—I'm her lover."

Lady Summerhay gasped.

"Bryan!"

"That fellow she married drinks. She had to leave him a year ago, with her baby—other reasons, too. Look here, Mother: this is hateful, but you'd got to know. There's no chance of a divorce." His voice grew higher. "Don't try to persuade me out of it. It's no good."

Lady Summerhay, from whose comely face the frock, as it were, had slipped, clasped her hands.

The swift descent of "life" on one to whom it had ever been a series of "cases" was cruel, and her son felt this without quite realising why. An abominably desolate piece of news! Taking her hand, he put it to his lips.

"Cheer up, Mother! She's happy, and so am I."

Lady Summerhay could only murmur:

"Is there—is there going to be a scandal?"

"I hope not; but, anyway, *he* knows about it."

"Society doesn't forgive."

"Awfully sorry for *you,* Mother."

"Oh, Bryan!"

The repetition jarred his nerves.

"You needn't tell anybody. We don't know what'll happen yet."

In Lady Summerhay all was sore and blank. A woman she had never seen, whose origin was doubtful, whose marriage must have soiled her, some kind of a siren, no doubt! Too hard! She believed in her son, had dreamed of public position for him, felt he would attain it as a matter of course. She said feebly:

"This Major Winton is a man of breeding, isn't he?"

"Rather! She's good enough for anyone. And the proudest woman I've ever met. If you're bothering as to what to do about her—don't! She won't want anything of anybody—I can tell you. She won't accept crumbs."

"That's lucky!" But, gazing at her son, Lady Summerhay became aware that she stood on the brink of a downfall in his heart. She said coldly:

"Are you going to live together openly?"

"If she will."

"You don't know yet?"

"I shall—soon."

The book on dreams slipped off her lap. She went to the fireplace and stood looking at her son. His merry look was gone; his face was strange to her. She remembered it like that once in the park at Widrington, when he lost his temper with a pony and came galloping past her, his curly hair stivered up like a little demon's. She said sadly:

"You can hardly expect me to like it for you, Bryan, even if she is what you say. And isn't there some story?"

"The more there is against her, the more I love her."

Lady Summerhay sighed.

"What is this man going to do? I heard him play once."

"Morally and legally, he's out of court. I only wish to God he *would* bring a case, and I could marry her; but Gyp says he won't."

"Gyp? Is that her name?" A sudden longing, not friendly, to see this woman seized her. "Will you bring her to see me? I'm alone here till Wednesday."

"I don't think she'll come. Mother, she's wonderful!"

A smile twisted his mother's lips. No doubt! Aphrodite! And—afterwards?

"Does Major Winton know?"

"Yes."

"What does he say to it?"

"From your point of view, or his, it's rotten. But in her position, everything's rotten."

The flood-gates gave way in Lady Summerhay, she poured forth a stream of words.

"Oh, my dear, can't you pull up? I've seen so many of these affairs go wrong. It really is not for nothing that law and conventions are what they are. The pressure's too great. It's only once in a way—very exceptional people, very exceptional circumstances. You mayn't think now that it'll hamper you, but it will—most fearfully. If you were a writer or an artist, who could take his work where he likes, live in a desert if he wants; but you've got to do yours here in London. Do think, before you go butting up against society! It's all very well to say it's no affair of anyone's, but you'll find it is, Bryan. Can you possibly make her happy in the long run?"

She stopped at the expression on his face.

"Mother, you don't seem to understand. I'm devoted so that there's nothing else for me."

"You mean bewitched."

"I mean what I said. Good night!"

"Won't you stay to dinner, dear?"

But he was gone, and vexation, anxiety, wretchedness, came on Lady Summerhay. She went to her dinner desolate and sore.

Summerhay made straight for home. The lamps were brightening in the early-autumn dusk; a draughty, ruffling wind flicked a yellow leaf here and there from off the plane-trees. Evening blue stained the colour of the town—the hour of fusion when day's hard and staring shapes are softening, growing dark, mysterious, and all that broods behind the lives of men and trees and houses comes down on the wings of illusion, and the poetry in a man wells up. But Summerhay still heard his mother's voice, and knew that his hand was against everyone's. There was a difference, it seemed to him, in the expression of each passer-by. Nothing any more would be a matter of course; and so far everything had been a matter of course. He did not realise this clearly yet; but had begun to take what nurses call "notice," forced on to the defensive against society.

Putting his latch-key into the lock, he recalled his sensation that afternoon, opening to Gyp for the first time—furtive, defiant. It would all be defiance now. Lighting a fire in his sitting-room, he began pulling out drawers, sorting and destroying, burning, making lists, packing papers. Finishing, he sat down to smoke. The room was quiet, and Gyp seemed to fill it with her presence. By closing his eyes he could see her there by the hearth, as she stood before they left, turning her face up to him. The more she loved him, the more he would love her! And he said aloud: "By God!" The old Scotch terrier, Ossian, came from his corner and shoved his long black nose into his master's hand.

"Come along up, Ossy! Good dog, Oss!" And comforted by the warmth of that black body beside him in the chair, Summerhay fell asleep in front of the fire smouldering with his past.

XI

Though Gyp had never seemed to look round, she had been quite conscious of Summerhay standing where they had parted, watching her into the house in Bury Street. The strength of her own feeling surprised her, as a bather in the sea is surprised, finding her feet will not touch bottom, carried away by the tide.

For the second night running, she hardly slept, hearing Big Ben boom, hour after hour. At breakfast, she told her father of Fiorsen's reappearance. He received the news with a shrewd glance.

"Well, Gyp?"

"I told him."

Curiosity, disapproval, to which he was not entitled, admiration of her pluck, fears for the consequences, disturbance at knowing her at last launched into the deep waters of love—it was the least of these feelings that found expression.

"How did he take it?"

"Rushed away. I feel sure he won't divorce me."

"No, I don't suppose even he would have that impudence!" And Winton was silent. "Well," he said suddenly, "it's on the knees of the gods then. But be careful, Gyp."

About noon, Betty returned from the sea, with a solemn, dark-eyed, cooing little Gyp, brown as a roasted coffee-berry. When she had been given all that she could wisely eat after the journey, Gyp carried her off to her own room, cuddled her up in a shawl and lay down with her on the bed. A few sleepy coos and strokings, and little Gyp left for the land of Nod. Her mother lay gazing at her black lashes with a kind of passion. She was not a great child-lover, but this child of hers, with her dark softness, plump delicacy, giving disposition, cooing voice, constant adjurations to "dear mum," was adorable, insidiously seductive. She had developed quickly, with the graceful roundness of a little animal, the perfection of a flower. The Italian blood of her great-great-grandmother was prepotent in her as yet; and her hair, which had lost its baby darkness, was already curving round her neck and waving on her forehead. One of her tiny brown hands had escaped the shawl and grasped its edge with determined softness. Gyp gazed at the pinkish

nails and their absurdly wee half-moons, at the sleeping tranquillity stirred by breathing no more than a rose-leaf on a windless day, and her lips grew fuller, trembled, reached towards the dark lashes, till she had to rein her neck back to stop her self-indulgence.

That evening, at dinner, Winton said calmly:

"I've been to see Fiorsen, and warned him off. Found him at that fellow Rosek's. And I met that girl, the dancer, coming out of the house as I was going in—made it plain I'd seen her, so I don't think he'll trouble you."

"How was she looking, Dad?"

Winton smiled. How to convey his impression of the figure he had seen coming down the steps—of those eyes growing round at sight of him, of that mouth opening?

"Much the same. Rather flabbergasted. A white hat—very smart. Attractive in her way, but common, of course. Those two were playing the piano and fiddle when I went up. They tried not to let me in. Queer place, that!"

Gyp could see it all so well. The black walls, silver statuettes, Rops drawings, dead rose-leaves and cigarettes—those two by the piano—her father so cool and dry!

"One can't stand on ceremony with fellows like that. I hadn't forgotten that Polish chap's behaviour to you, my dear."

Through Gyp passed a quiver of dread.

"I'm almost sorry you went, Dad. Did you say anything very——"

"No; I think I was quite polite. I won't swear I didn't call one of them a ruffian. They said something about my presuming on being a cripple."

"Oh, darling!"

"That Polish chap——"

Again she felt that dread. Rosek's pale, suave face, with eyes behind which were such hidden things, and lips sweetish, restrained, sensual—he would never forgive! But Winton was smiling. He was pleased with an encounter which had relieved his feelings.

Gyp spent all that evening writing her first real love-letter. But when, next afternoon at six, in fulfilment of its wording, she came to Summerhay's little house, the blinds were down and it had a deserted look. He should have been at the window, waiting. Had he, then, not got her letter, not been home since yesterday? The chill fear which besets lovers' hearts at failure

of a tryst smote her for the first time. In the three-cornered garden stood a decayed Eros with a broken bow—a sparrow on its greenish shoulder; sooty lilac-leaves round its head, and at its legs the old Scotch terrier sniffing. "Ossy!" The old dog came, wagging its tail feebly.

"Master! Where is master?"

Ossian poked his long nose into her calf. She passed from the deserted house with all manner of frightened thoughts. Where had he gone? Why had he not let her know? Her scepticism ran riot. What did she know of him, except that he said he loved her? The jealous feelings that had so besieged her at the bungalow when his letters ceased, came again with redoubled force. There must be some woman who had claim on him, some girl whom he admired. She was amazed by her capacity for jealousy. She had always thought she would be too proud to feel that sensation so dark and wretched and undignified—so horribly real and clinging.

Winton had gone to his club, and she partook of a little trumped-up meal; then put on her things again and slipped out. She went past St. James's Church into Piccadilly, to the farther, crowded side, and began to walk towards the park. To do a foolish thing was some relief, and she went along with a faint smile. Women of the town came rounding out of side streets, with their skilled, rapid-seeming slowness. And at the discomfited, half-hostile stares on their rouged and powdered faces, Gyp felt a wicked glee. She was disturbing, hurting them—and she wanted to hurt.

A man, in evening dress, with overcoat thrown open ranged up beside her. She walked straight on, with her half-smile, knowing him puzzled and fearfully attracted. Then at the expression on her face, he wilted away, and again she felt that wicked glee.

She crossed out into the traffic, to the park side, and turned back towards St. James's, possessed now by a profound, black sadness. If only her lover were beside her among the lights and shadows of the trees, in the warm air! Why was he not among these passers-by? She could bring any casual man to her side by a smile, but could not conjure up the only one she wanted from this great desert of a town! At the corner of St. James's Street she stopped. That was his club. Perhaps he was there, playing cards or billiards, a few yards away, and yet as in another world. Presently he would come out, go to some

music-hall, or stroll home thinking of her—perhaps not even thinking of her! And, close under the windows of the club, she hurried home.

Next morning brought a letter. Summerhay wrote from an inn on the river, asking her to come down by the eleven o'clock train. He would meet her at the station. He wanted to show her a house he had seen; they could have the afternoon on the river! She received this letter with an ecstasy she could not quite conceal. And Winton, who had watched her face, said:

"I think I shall go to Newmarket, Gyp. Home to-morrow evening."

In the train on the way down, she sat in a sort of trance. If her lover had been there, he could not have seemed nearer.

She saw him as the train ran in; they met without a hand-clasp, without a word, just looking at each other.

A little victoria "dup up"—as Summerhay said—"horse, driver and all," carried them off, with hands clasped under cover of the rug.

The day was of early September when the sun is hot, yet not too hot, and its light falls silken on trees just losing the opulence of summer, on silvery-gold reaped fields, silvery-green uplands, golden mustard; when shots ring out in the distance, and, as one gazes, a leaf falls, without seeming reason. By a lane, past a clump of beeches, they reached a lonely house, of very old red brick, covered by Virginia creeper just turning; with an inglenook and low, broad chimneys. Before it was a walled, neglected lawn, with poplars and a large walnut-tree. The sunlight seemed to have collected in that garden, and there was a great humming of bees. Above the trees, the downs could be seen where racehorses, they said, were trained. Summerhay had the keys, and they went in. It was like a child's "pretending"—to imagine they were going to live there together, to sort out the rooms and consecrate each. She would not spoil it by argument or admission of the need for a decision. And when he asked:

"Well, darling, what do you think of it?" she only answered:

"Oh, lovely, in a way; but let's go back to the river and make the most of it."

They took boat at the inn where he was staying. To Summerhay, a rowing man at Oxford, the river was known from Leichlade to Richmond: but Gyp had never in her life been on it, and its placid magic almost overwhelmed her. On this glistening, windless day, to drift along past the bright, flat water-lily

leaves over the greenish depths; to listen to the pigeons cooing, watch the dragon-flies flitting past, the fish leaping lazily, letting her hand dabble in the water, cooling her sun-warmed cheek with it, gazing at her lover, was a voyage down the river of dreams, the fulfilment of felicity. Had she really had a life with another man only a year ago?

But when, in the last backwater, he tied the boat up and came to sit with her once more, it was already late, and the vague melancholy of the shadowy river came stealing into her. With a sinking at her heart, she heard him begin to plead.

"Gyp, we *must* go away together. We can never stand it apart, just snatching hours like this."

"Why not, darling? Hasn't this been perfect? What could we ever have more perfect? It's been paradise itself!"

"Yes; but to be thrown out every day! To be whole days and nights without you! Gyp, you must! Don't you love me enough?"

"Too much. It's tempting Providence to change. Let's go on as we are, Bryan."

"Why are you afraid?"

"Oh! Let it be like this. Don't let's change or risk anything."

"Is it people—society—you're afraid of? I thought *you* wouldn't care."

Gyp smiled.

"Society? No; I'm not afraid of that."

"What, then? Of me?"

"I don't know. Men soon get tired. I'm a doubter, I can't help it."

"As if anyone could tire of you! Are you afraid of yourself?"

Again Gyp smiled.

"Not of loving too little."

"How can one love too much?"

She drew his face down to her lips.

"No, Bryan; let's go on as we are. I'll make up to you when I'm with you. If you were to tire of me, I couldn't bear it."

For a long time more he pleaded—with anger, with kisses, with reasonings; but, to all, she opposed that same tender, half-mournful "No." It was dusk when they left the boat, and dew was falling. Just before they reached the station, she caught his hand to her breast.

"Darling, don't be angry with me! Perhaps I will—some day."

And, in the train, she tried to think herself once more in the boat, among the shadows and the whispering reeds and all the quiet wonder of the river.

XII

She let herself in stealthily, and went up at once to her room. She was taking off her blouse when Betty entered, with tears rolling down her cheeks.

"Betty! What is it?"

"Oh, my dear, where *have* you been? They've stolen her! That wicked man—your husband—he took her right out of her pram—and went off with her in a great car—he and that other one! I've been half out of my mind!" Gyp stared aghast. "The major away and all—what was I to do? I'd just turned round to shut the gate of the square gardens, and I never saw him till he'd put his great long arm over the pram and snatched her out." And, sitting on the bed, she gave way utterly.

Gyp stood motionless, in terror. That vengeful wretch, Rosek!

"Oh, Betty, she must be crying!"

A fresh outburst of moans was the only answer. And she remembered suddenly what the lawyer had said a year ago—in law, Fiorsen could claim her child. She could have got her back, then, by bringing a horrible case against him, but now—perhaps she could not. Was it her return to Fiorsen that they aimed at—or the giving up of her lover? She went over to her mirror, saying:

"We'll go at once, Betty, and get her back somehow. Wash your face."

While she made ready, she fought down those two horrible fears—of losing her child, of losing her lover; the less she feared, the better she could act, the more subtly, swiftly. Somewhere she had a little stiletto, given her a long time ago. She hunted it out, slipped off its red-leather sheath, and, stabbing the point into a tiny cork, slipped it beneath her blouse. If they could steal her baby, they were capable of anything. She wrote a note to her father, telling him what had happened, and where she had gone. Then, in a taxi, they set forth. Cold water and the calmness of her mistress had removed from Betty the main traces of emotion; but she clasped Gyp's hand, and gave vent to heavy sighs.

Gyp would not think. If she thought of her little one crying, she knew she would cry too. But her hatred for those who

had dealt this cowardly blow grew within her. She took a resolution and said quietly:

"Mr. Summerhay, Betty. That's why they've stolen our darling. I suppose you know he and I care for each other. They've stolen her so as to make me do anything they like."

A wheeze answered her.

That moon-face seemed all in conflict between morality and belief in Gyp, fears for her and wishes for her happiness, the loyal retainer and the old nurse.

"Oh dear! He's a nice gentleman, too! I never did hold you was rightly married to that foreigner in that horrible registry place—no music, no flowers, no blessin' asked, nor nothing. I cried me eyes out at the time."

"No; Betty, I only thought I was in love." A convulsive squeeze and creaking heralded a fresh outburst. "Don't cry; we're just there. Think of our darling!"

The cab stopped. Feeling for her little weapon, she got out, and with her hand slipped firmly under Betty's arm, led the way upstairs, haunted by memories of Daphne Wing and Rosek, of that large woman—what was her name?—of other faces and unholy hours; memories of late returnings down these wide stairs out to their cab, of Fiorsen beside her in the darkness, his face moody in the corner or pressed close to hers. Once they had walked a long way homeward in the dawn, Rosek with them. Dim, unreal memories! Grasping Betty's arm more firmly, she rang the bell.

"Is Mr. Fiorsen in, Ford?"

"No ma'am; Mr. Fiorsen and Count Rosek went into the country this afternoon. I haven't their address at present." She must have turned white, for she heard the man say: "Anything I can get you, ma'am?"

"When did they start, please?"

"One o'clock, ma'am—by car. Count Rosek was driving. I should say they wont be away long—they just had their bags with them. I could let you know the moment they return, ma'am, if you'd kindly leave me your address."

Giving her card, and murmuring:

"Thank you, Ford; thank you very much," she grasped Betty's arm again and leaned heavily on her going down the stairs.

It was real, black fear now. To lose helpless things—children—dogs—and know for certain that one cannot get to them, no

matter what they may be suffering! To be pinned down to ignorance and have in her ears the crying of her child—this horror Gyp suffered now. And nothing to be done! Nothing but to go to bed and wait! Mercifully—thanks to her long day in the open—she fell at last into a dreamless sleep. When she was called, there was a letter from Fiorsen on the tray with her tea.

"GYP:

"I am not a baby-stealer like your father. The law gives me the right to my own child. But swear to give up your lover, and the baby shall come back to you at once. If you do not give him up. I will take her away out of England. Send me an answer to this post-office, and do not let your father try any tricks upon me.

"GUSTAV FIORSEN."

Beneath was written the address of a West End post-office.

After a moment of mental anguish, her wits and wariness came back. Had he been drinking when he wrote that letter? She could fancy she smelled brandy, but it was easy to fancy what one wanted to. She read it through again. If he had composed the wording himself, he would never have resisted a gibe at the law, or a gibe at himself for thus safeguarding her virtue. It was Rosek's dictation. Her anger flamed up anew. Why need she herself be scrupulous? She sprang out of bed and wrote:

"How *could* you do such a brutal thing? At all events, let the darling have her nurse. It's not like you to let a little child suffer. Betty will be ready to come the minute you send for her. As for myself, you must give me time to decide. I will let you know within two days.

"GYP."

When she had sent this off, and a telegram to her father at Newmarket, she read Fiorsen's letter once more, and was more than ever certain it was Rosek's wording. And, suddenly, she thought of Daphne Wing. Through her there might be a chance. She seemed to see again the girl lying white and void of hope, robbed by death of her own babe. Surely it was worth trying.

An hour later, her cab stopped before the Wagges' door. She was ringing the bell when a voice from behind her said:

"Allow me; I have a key. Ow, it's you!" Mr. Wagge, in professional habiliments, was standing there. "Come in; come in," he said. "I was wondering whether perhaps we shouldn't be seeing you after what's transpired."

Hanging up his tall black hat, craped nearly to the crown, he said huskily:

"I *did* think we'd seen the last of that," and opened the dining-room door.

In that too well-remembered room the table was laid with a stained white cloth and a bottle of Worcester sauce. The little blue bowl was gone; nothing now marred the harmony of red and green. Gyp said quickly:

"Doesn't Daph—Daisy live at home, then, now?"

On Mr. Wagge's face suspicion, relief, and craftiness were blended with that furtive admiration which Gyp seemed always to excite in him.

"Do I understand that you—er——"

"I came to ask if Daisy would do something for me."

Mr. Wagge blew his nose.

"You didn't know——?"

"Yes; I dare say she sees my husband; but I don't mind—he's nothing to me now."

Mr. Wagge's face became further complicated by the expression of a husband.

"Well, it's not to be wondered at, perhaps, in the circumstances. I'm sure I always thought——"

Gyp interrupted swiftly.

"Please, Mr. Wagge—please! Will you give me Daisy's address?"

Mr. Wagge remained a moment in deep thought, then said, in a gruff, jerky voice:

"Seventy-three Comrade Street, So'o. Up to seeing him there on Tuesday, I must say I cherished every hope. Now I'm only sorry I didn't strike him,—he was too quick for me——" He had raised one of his gloved hands and was sawing it up and down. "It's her blasted independence—I beg pardon—but who wouldn't?" he ended suddenly.

Gyp passed him.

"Who wouldn't?" she heard his voice behind her. "I did think she'd have run straight this time——" And while she

was fumbling at the outer door, his pudgy face, with its round grey beard, protruded over her shoulder. "If you're going to see her, I hope you'll——"

In her cab Gyp shivered. Once she had lunched with her father at a restaurant in the Strand. It had been full of Mr. Wagges.

XIII

SEVENTY-THREE Comrade Street, Soho, was difficult to find; but, with the aid of a milk-boy, Gyp discovered the right door. A plump white hand and wrist emerging took the can, and Daphne Wing's voice said:

"Oh, where's the cream?"

"Ain't got none."

"Oh! I told you always—two pennyworth at twelve o'clock."

"Two penn-orth." The boy's eyes goggled.

"Didn't you want to speak to her, miss?" He beat the closing door. "Lidy wants to speak to you! Good mornin', miss."

The figure of Daphne Wing in a blue kimono was revealed. Her eyes peered round at Gyp.

"Oh!" she said.

"May I come in?"

"Oh, yes! Oh, do! I've been practising. Oh, I am glad to see you!"

In the middle of the studio, a little table was laid for two. Daphne Wing went up to it, holding in one hand the milk-can and in the other a short knife, with which she had evidently been opening oysters. She turned round to Gyp. Her face was deep pink, and so was her neck, which ran V-shaped down into the folds of her kimono. Her eyes, round as saucers, met Gyp's.

"Oh, Mrs. Fiorsen, I am glad! I really am. I wanted you so much to see my room—do you like it? How *did* you know where I was?" She looked down and added: "I think I'd better tell you. Mr. Fiorsen came here, and, since then, I've seen him at Count Rosek's—and—and——"

"Yes; but don't trouble to tell me, please."

Daphne Wing hurried on.

"Of course, I'm quite mistress of myself now." Then, all at once, the uneasy woman-of-the-world mask dropped from her face and she seized Gyp's hand. "Oh, Mrs. Fiorsen, I shall never be like you!"

"I hope not." How could she ask this girl anything? She choked back that feeling, and said stonily: "Do you remember

my baby? No, of course; you never saw her. *He* and Count Rosek have just taken her away from me."

Daphne Wing convulsively squeezed the hand.

"Oh, what a wicked thing! When?"

"Yesterday afternoon."

"Oh, I *am* glad I haven't seen him since! Oh, I *do* think that was wicked! Aren't you dreadfully distressed?" The least of smiles played on Gyp's mouth. Daphne Wing burst forth: "D'you know—I think—I think your self-control is something awful. It frightens me. If my baby had lived and been stolen like that, I should have been half dead by now."

Gyp answered stonily:

"Yes; I want her back, and I wondered——"

Daphne Wing clasped her hands.

"Oh, I expect I can make him——" She stopped, confused, then added hastily: "Are you sure you don't mind?"

"I shouldn't mind if he had fifty loves. Perhaps he has."

Daphne Wing's teeth came down rather viciously on her lower lip.

"I mean him to do what *I* want now, not what he wants me. That's the only way when you love. Oh, don't smile like that, please; you do make me feel so—uncertain."

"When are you going to see him next?"

Daphne Wing grew very pink.

"He might be coming in to lunch. It's not as if he were a stranger, is it?" Casting up her eyes a little, she added: "He won't even let me speak your name; it makes him mad. That's why I'm sure he still loves you; only, his love is so funny." And, seizing Gyp's hand: "I shall never forget how good you were to me. I do hope you—you love somebody else." Gyp pressed those damp, clinging fingers, and Miss Wing hurried on: "I'm sure your baby's a darling. How you must be suffering! You look quite pale. But it isn't any good suffering. I learned that."

Gyp bent forward and put her lips to the girl's forehead.

"Good-bye. My baby would thank you if she knew."

And she turned to go. She heard a sob. But before she could speak, Daphne Wing struck herself on the throat, and said, in a strangled voice:

"Tha—that's idiotic! I—I haven't cried since—since, you know. I—I's perfect mistress of myself; only, I—only—I suppose you reminded me—I *never* cry!"

Those words and the sound of a hiccough accompanied Gyp down the alley to her cab.

Back in Bury Street, she found Betty sitting in the hall with her bonnet on. She had not been sent for, nor had any reply come from Newmarket. Gyp could not eat, could settle to nothing. She went up to her bedroom to get away from the servants' eyes. Every other minute she stopped to listen to sounds that meant nothing, went a hundred times to the window. Betty was in the nursery opposite; Gyp could hear her moving about among her household gods. Presently, those sounds ceased, and, peering into the room, she saw the stout woman sitting on a trunk, with her back turned, uttering heavy sighs. Gyp stole back into her own room, trembling. If—if her baby really could not be recovered except by that sacrifice! If that cruel letter were the last word, and she forced to decide between them! Which would she give up? Which follow—her lover or her child?

She went to the window for air—the pain about her heart was dreadful. She felt dizzy from the violence of a struggle that refused coherent thought or feeling, was just a dumb pull of instincts, both so strong—how terribly strong she had not till then realised.

Her eyes fell on the picture that reminded her of Bryan; it seemed now to have no resemblance—none. He was much too real, and loved, and wanted. Less than twenty-four hours ago, she had turned a deaf ear to his pleading that she should go to him for ever. How funny! She would rush to him now—go when and where he liked! If only she were back in his arms! Never could she give him up! But then in her ears sounded the cooing words, "Dear mum!" Her baby—that tiny thing—how could she give her up, never again hold close and kiss that round, perfect little body, that grave little dark-eyed face?

The roar of London came in through the open window. So much life, so many people—and not a soul could help! She left the window and went to the cottage-piano she had there, out of Winton's way. And she sat with arms folded, looking at the keys. The song that girl had sung at Fiorsen's concert—song of the broken heart—came back to her.

No, no; she couldn't—couldn't! It was to her lover she would cling. And tears ran down her cheeks.

A cab had stopped below, but not till Betty came rushing in did she look up.

XIV

When, trembling violently, she entered the dining-room, Fiorsen was standing by the sideboard, holding the child.

He came straight up and put her into Gyp's arms.

"Take her," he said, "and do what you will. Be happy."

Hugging her baby, Gyp answered nothing. She could not have spoken a word to save her life; grateful, bewildered, abashed, yet instinctively aware of something evanescent and unreal in his altruism. Daphne Wing! What bargain did this represent?

Fiorsen must have felt the chill of this instinctive vision, for he cried out:

"You never believed in me; you never thought me capable of good!"

Gyp bent to hide the quivering of her lips.

"I am sorry—very sorry."

Fiorsen looked into her face.

"By God, I am afraid I shall never forget you—never!"

Tears had come into his eyes, and Gyp watched them, moved, troubled, but still deeply mistrustful.

He brushed his hand across his face. 'He means me to see them!' she thought.

Fiorsen saw, and muttering suddenly:

"Good-bye, Gyp! I am *not* all bad!" was gone.

That passionate "I am *not!*" saved Gyp from breakdown. Even at his highest pitch of abnegation, he could not forget himself.

Overwhelming relief is slowly realised; but presently it seemed as if she must cry out, and tell the whole world of her intoxicating happiness. And the moment little Gyp was in Betty's arms, she sat down and wrote to Summerhay:

"Darling,

"I've had a fearful time. My baby was stolen by him while I was with you. He wrote saying he would give her back if I gave you up. But I found I couldn't give you up, not even for my baby. And then, a few minutes ago, he brought her—none the worse. To-morrow we shall all go down to Mildenham; but

very soon, if you still want me, I'll come with you wherever you like. My father and Betty will take care of my treasure till we come back; and then, perhaps, the old red house we saw—after all. Only—now is the time for you to draw back. Don't let any foolish pity—or honour—weigh with you; be utterly sure, I beseech you. I can just bear it now if it's for your good. The worst misery of all would be to make you unhappy. Oh, make sure—make sure! I shall understand. I mean this with every bit of me. And now, good-night, and perhaps—good-bye.

"Your

"Gyp."

She read it over. Did she really mean that she could bear it if he drew back—if, looking into the far future, he decided that she was not worth the candle?

She closed and sealed the letter. Why had one a heart so much too soft?

Ten days later, at Mildenham station, holding her father's hand, Gyp could scarcely see him for the mist before her eyes.

"Good-bye, my love! Take care of yourself; wire from London, and again from Paris. He has luck; I had none."

The mist became tears, rolled down, fell on his glove.

"Not too long out there, Gyp!"

She pressed her wet cheek to his. The train moved, but, so long as she could see, she watched him waving his grey hat; then sat down, blinded with tears behind her veil. She had not cried when she left him the day of her fatal marriage; she cried now that she was leaving him to go to happiness.

But her heart had grown since then.

PART IV

I

Little Gyp, aged nearly four and a half that first of May, stood at the edge of the tulip border, bowing to two hen turkeys who were poking their heads among the flowers. She was very like her mother, with the same oval-shaped face, dark arched brows, large and clear brown eyes; but she had the modern child's open-air look; her hair, curling over at the ends, was not allowed to be long, and her polished brown legs were bare to the knees.

"Turkeys! You aren't good, are you? Come *on!*" And, stretching out her hands with the palms held up, she backed away from the tulip-bed. The turkeys, trailing delicately their long-toed feet and uttering liquid interrogations, moved after her in hopes of what she was not holding in her little brown hands. The slanting sun painted that small procession—the deep blue frock of little Gyp, the glint of gold in the chestnut of her hair; the daisy-starred grass; the dark birds with translucent red dewlaps and checkered tails, the tulips, puce, red and yellow. Having lured them to the open gate, little Gyp raised herself, and said:

"Aren't you duffies, dears? Shoo!" And on the tails of the turkeys she shut the gate. Then she went to where, under the walnut-tree—the one large tree of that walled garden—a very old Scotch terrier was lying. Sitting down beside him, she began stroking his white muzzle, saying:

"Ossy, Ossy, do you love me?"

Then, seeing her mother in the porch, she jumped up, and crying out: "Ossy—Ossy! Walk!" rushed to Gyp and embraced her legs, while the old Scotch terrier slowly followed.

Nearly three years had changed Gyp a little. Her face was softer, rather more grave, her form a little fuller, her hair darker, and, instead of waving in wings, smoothly gathered round in a lustrous helmet, better revealing the shape of her head.

"Darling, go and ask Pettance to put a fresh piece of sulphur in Ossy's water-bowl, and to cut up his meat finer. You can

give Hotspur and Brownie two lumps of sugar each; and then we'll go out." Going on her knees, she parted the old dog's hair, and examined his eczema, thinking: 'Oh, ducky, you're not smelling your best! Yes; only—not my face!'

A telegraph-boy was coming from the gate. She opened the missive with the faint tremor she always felt when Summerhay was not with her.

"Detained; shall be down by last train; need not come up to-morrow.—BRYAN."

When the boy was gone, she stooped and stroked the old dog's head.

"Master home all day to-morrow, Ossy—master home!"

A voice from the path said, "Beautiful evenin', ma'am."

The "old scoundrel," Pettance, stiffer in the ankle-joints, with more lines in his gargoyle's face, fewer stumps in his gargoyle's mouth, more film over his dark, burning little eyes, was standing before her, and, behind him, little Gyp, one foot rather before the other, as Gyp had been wont to stand, waited gravely.

"Oh, Pettance, Mr. Summerhay will be at home all to-morrow, and we'll go a long ride; and when you exercise, will you call at the inn, in case I don't go that way, and tell Major Winton I expect him to dinner to-night?"

"Yes, ma'am; and I've seen the pony for little Miss Gyp this morning, ma'am. It's a mouse pony, five year old, sound, good temper, pretty little paces. I says to the man: 'Don't you come it over me,' I says; 'I was born on an 'orse. Talk of twenty pound for that pony! Ten, and lucky to get it!' 'Well,' he says, 'Pettance, it's no good to talk round an' round with you. Fifteen!' he says. 'I'll throw you one in,' I says, 'Eleven! Take it or leave it.' 'Ah!' he says, 'Pettance, *you* know 'ow to buy an 'orse. All right,' he says; 'twelve!' She's worth all of fifteen, ma'am, and the major's passed her. So if you likes to have 'er, there she is!"

Gyp looked at her little daughter, who had given one excited hop, but now stood still, her eyes flying up at her mother and her lips parted; and she thought: 'The darling! She never begs for anything!'

"Very well, Pettance; buy her."

"Yes, ma'am—very good, ma'am. Beautiful evenin', ma'am." And, withdrawing at his gait of one whose feet are at per-

manent right angles to the legs, he mused: 'And that'll be two in my pocket.'

Ten minutes later Gyp, with her child and dog, set out for their evening walk. They went, not as usual, up to the downs, but towards the river, making for what they called "the wild"—two sedgy meadows, hedged by banks on which grew oaks and ashes. An old stone linhay, covered to its broken thatch by a huge ivy bush, stood at the angle where the meadows met. The spot was strange in that kempt countryside of cornfields, grass, and beech-clumps, favoured by beasts and birds, and little Gyp had recently seen two baby hares. From an oak-tree, where the crinkled leaves were not yet large enough to hide him, a cuckoo was calling and they stopped to look till he flew off. The singing and serenity, the green and golden oaks and ashes, the flowers—marsh-orchis, ladies' smocks, and cuckoo-buds, starring the rushy grass—all brought to Gyp that feeling of the uncapturable spirit which lies behind the forms of nature, the shadowy, hovering smile of life ever vanishing and springing again out of death. Close to the linhay a bird came flying in wide circles, uttering shrill cries. It had a long beak, long, pointed wings, and seemed distressed. Little Gyp squeezed her mother's hand.

"Isn't it a poor bird, mum?"

"It's a curlew. Perhaps its mate is hurt."

"What is its mate?"

"The bird it lives with."

"Its afraid of us."

"Shall we go and see if we can find out what's the matter?"

The curlew continued to circle, always uttering those shrill cries. Little Gyp said:

"Mum, could we speak to it? Because we're not going to hurt nothing, are we?"

"Of course not, darling! But I'm afraid the poor bird's too wild. Try, if you like."

Little Gyp's piping joined the curlew's cries in the quiet of the evening.

"Oh, look; it's dipping close to the ground, over there—it's got a nest! We won't go near, will we?"

Little Gyp echoed in a hushed voice:

"It's got a nest."

They stole back out of the gate close to the linhay, the curlew still flighting and crying behind them.

"Aren't we glad the mate isn't hurt, mum?"

Gyp answered with a shiver:

"Yes, darling, fearfully glad. Shall we go down and ask Grandy to come up to dinner?"

Little Gyp hopped. And they went towards the river.

At the river inn Winton had for two years had rooms. He had refused to make his home with Gyp, desiring to be on hand only when she wanted him. He led a simple life in those simple quarters, riding with her when Summerhay was in town, laying plans for the defence of her position, visiting the cottagers, devoting himself to the whims of little Gyp. This moment, when his grandchild was to begin to ride, was in a manner sacred to one for whom life had scant meaning apart from horses. Looking at them, hand in hand, Gyp thought: 'Dad loves her as much as he loves me now.'

Lonely dinner at the inn was an infliction studiously concealed; he accepted their invitation without alacrity.

The Red House contained nothing that had been in Gyp's married home except the piano. It had white walls, furniture of old oak, and reproductions of her favourite pictures. Winton got on well enough with Summerhay, but enjoyed himself much more when alone with his daughter. This evening he was especially glad to have her to himself; she had seemed of late rather grave and absent-minded.

"I wish you saw more people," he said.

"Oh no, Dad."

Watching her smile, he thought: 'That's not "sour grapes"—What is the trouble, then?'

"I suppose you've not heard anything of Fiorsen lately?"

"Not a word. But he's playing again in London this season, I see."

"Ah! that'll cheer them." It was not that, then. But there was something!

"I hear that Bryan's going ahead. I met a man in town last week who spoke of him as the most promising junior at the bar."

"Yes; he's doing awfully well." A faint sigh caught his ears. "Would you say he's changed much since you knew him, Dad?"

"A little less jokey."

"Yes; he's lost his laugh."

Evenly and softly said, it affected Winton.

"Can't expect him to keep that," he answered, "turning people inside out, day after day—and most of them rotten."

Strolling back in the moonlight, he wished he had said directly: 'Are you worrying about him—or have people been making themselves unpleasant?'

In these last three years he had become unconsciously inimical to his own class, more than ever friendly to the poor—visiting the labourers, small farmers, small tradesmen, doing them little turns, giving their children sixpences. That they could not afford to put on airs of virtue escaped him; he perceived only that they were respectful and friendly to Gyp. His heart warmed to them in proportion as he grew exasperated with the two or three landed families, and that *parvenu* lot in the riverside villas.

When he first came down, the chief landowner—a man he had known for years—had invited him to lunch. He had accepted with the deliberate intention of finding out where he was, and had taken the first natural opportunity of mentioning his daughter. She was, he said, devoted to her flowers; the Red House had quite a good garden. His friend's wife had answered with a nervous smile: "Oh! yes; of course—yes." And silence had fallen. Since then, Winton had saluted his friend and his friend's wife with frigid politeness. He had not gone there fishing for Gyp to be called on, but to show these people that his daughter could not be slighted with impunity. And yet, man of the world to his finger tips, he knew perfectly well that, living with a man to whom she was not married, she could not be recognised by people with any pretensions to goodness; Gyp was beyond even the debatable ground on which stood those who have been divorced and are married again. But even a man of the world is not proof against the warping of devotion, and Winton was ready to charge any windmill at any moment on her behalf.

Exhaling the last puffs of his good-night cigarette, he thought: 'What wouldn't I give for the old days, and a chance to wing some of these moral upstarts!'

II

THE last train was not due till eleven-thirty, and Gyp went to Summerhay's study, over which was their bedroom. She would have been horrified if she had known of her father's sentiments. She had certainly no wish to see more people. The conditions of her life often seemed to her ideal. She was free of people she did not care about, and of all empty social functions. Everything she had now was real—love, and nature, riding, music, animals, and poor people. What else was worth having? It often seemed to her that books and plays about unhappy women in her position were false. If one loved, what could one want better? Such women could have no pride; or else could not really love! She had recently been reading "Anna Karenina," and had often said to herself: "There's something not true about it—as if Tolstoy wanted to make us believe that Anna was secretly feeling remorse. If one loves, one doesn't feel remorse."

She derived positive joy from the feeling that her love imposed isolation; she liked to be apart—for him. Besides, by her birth she was outside the fold of society, her love beyond the love of those within it—as her father's love had been before her. And her pride greater than theirs, too. How could women mope and moan because they were cast out, and try to scratch their way back where they were not welcome? Even if Fiorsen died, would she marry her lover? What difference would it make? She could not love him more. For herself, she would rather go on as she was. But for him, she was not certain. He was not bound now, could leave her when he tired! And yet—did he not perhaps feel himself more bound that if they were married—unfairly bound? It was this thought—this shadow of a thought—which had given her, of late, the extra gravity noticed by her father.

In that unlighted room with the moonbeams drifting in, she sat down at Summerhay's bureau, where he often worked too late at his cases, depriving her of himself. Resting her bare elbows on the wood, she gazed out into the moonlight, drifting on a stream of memories beginning from the year when he came into her life.

So many memories, nearly all happy! Adroit of the jeweller who put the human soul together to give it power to forget the dark and remember the sunshine! The year and a half of her life with Fiorsen, the empty months that followed it were as mist dispersed by the radiance of the last three years. The only cloud had been the doubt whether Summerhay really loved her as much as she loved him. Her mind was ever at stretch on that point, comparing past days and nights with the days and nights of the present. Her prevision that, when she loved, it would be desperately, had been fulfilled. He had become her life. And since her besetting strength and weakness alike was pride—no wonder that she doubted.

For their Odyssey they had gone to Spain—that brown un-European land of "lyrio" flowers, and cries of "Agua!" in the streets, where the men seem cleft to the waist when astride of horses, under their wide black hats, and black-clothed women with wonderful eyes still look as if they missed Eastern veils. They had spent a month of gaiety and glamour, last days of September, early days of October, a revel of enchanted wanderings in the streets of Seville, of embraces and laughter, of strange scents, strange sounds, of orange light and velvety shadows, and all the warmth and deep gravity of Spain. The Alcazar, the cigarette-girls, the Gipsy dancers of Triana, the old brown ruins to which they rode, the streets, and the square with its grave talkers sitting on benches in the sun, the water-sellers and the melons; the mules, and the dark ragged man out of a dream, picking up the ends of cigarettes, the wine of Malaga, the grapes of Alicante! They had come back across the burnt uplands of Castile to Madrid and Goya and Velasquez, till it was time for Paris, before the law-term began. There, in a queer little French hotel, they had spent a week, with many pleasant and one disconcerting memory. On the last night they were having supper after the theatre, when in a mirror she saw three people come in and take seats at a table behind—Fiorsen, Rosek, and Daphne Wing! While they were ordering, she was safe, for Rosek was a *gourmet,* and the girl would certainly be hungry; but, after that, nothing could save her being seen! Should she pretend to feel faint and slip out? Or let Bryan know? Or sit there talking, eating, as if nothing were behind her?

Her face in the mirror had a flush, her eyes were bright. They would see that she was happy in her love. Her foot sought Summerhay's beneath the table. Splendidly brown and fit he

looked, compared with those pale, towny creatures! And he was gazing at her as though just discovering her beauty. How could she ever have endured that man with his little beard, his white face, those eyes! Then, in the mirror, she saw Rosek's dark-circled eyes betray recognition by a sudden gleam, saw his lips compressed, and a faint red come up in his cheeks. What would he do? The girl's back was turned—she was eating. And Fiorsen was staring straight before him in that moody way she knew so well. All depended on that deadly little man, who had once kissed her throat. She felt quite sick. If her lover knew that within five yards of him were those two men! Rosek had seen that she was conscious. She saw him whisper to the girl. Daphne Wing turned to look, her mouth opened in a smothered "Oh!" and Gyp saw her uneasy glance at Fiorsen. Surely she would want to get away before he saw! Yes; very soon she rose. What little airs—quite mistress of the situation! The wrap must be placed exactly on her shoulders; and how she walked, with one startled look back from the door. Gone! Gyp said:

"Let's go, darling."

She felt as if they had both escaped a deadly peril—not from anything those two could do to him or her, but from the ache and jealousy which the sight of that man would have brought him.

All through the first weeks of life together, there was a kind of wise watchfulness in Gyp. He was only a boy in knowledge, though his character was so much more decided, active, and insistent than her own; it lay with her to shape the course, avoid the shallows and sunken rocks. While the house under the Berkshire downs was being got ready, they lived at a London hotel. She let him tell no one of their life together. She wanted to be firmly settled in first, with little Gyp and Betty and the horses, as much like respectable married life as possible. But in the first week after their return a card was brought up to her: "Lady Summerhay." When the page-boy was gone, she looked at herself doubtfully in the glass. She seemed to know exactly what that tall woman whom she had seen on the platform would think of her—soft, not capable, not right for him!—not even if legally his wife. And touching her hair, laying a dab of scent on her eyebrows, she went downstairs fluttering, outwardly calm.

In the low-roofed lounge, "entirely renovated," her visitor

was rapidly turning the pages of a magazine, as people will at a dentist's when their minds are set on a coming operation. And she thought: 'I believe she's more frightened than I am!'

Lady Summerhay held out a gloved hand.

"How do you do? I hope you'll forgive my coming."

"It was very good of you. I'm sorry Bryan isn't in. Will you have some tea?"

"I've had tea; but do let's sit down. How do you find the hotel?"

"Very nice."

On a velvet lounge that had survived renovation, they sat side by side, screwed round towards each other.

"Bryan's told me what a pleasant time you had abroad. He's looking very well, I think. I'm devoted to him, you know."

Gyp answered softly:

"Yes, you must be." Her heart felt suddenly hard as flint.

Lady Summerhay gave her a quick look.

"I—I hope you won't mind my being frank—I've been so worried. It's an unhappy position, isn't it? If there's anything I can do to help, I should be so glad—it must be horrid for you."

Gyp said very quietly:

"Oh! no. I couldn't be happier."

Lady Summerhay was looking at her fixedly.

"One doesn't realise these things at first—neither of you will, till you see how dreadfully society can cold-shoulder."

Gyp smiled.

"One can only be cold-shouldered if one puts oneself in the way of it. I should never wish to see anyone who couldn't take me just for what I am. And I don't really see what difference it will make to Bryan; most men of his age have someone, somewhere." She hated this society woman, who—disguise it as she would—was at heart her enemy, regarded her as an enslaver, a despoiler of her son's worldly chances, a Delilah dragging him down. And still more quietly she said: "He need tell no one of my existence; and you can be quite sure that if ever he feels he's had enough of me, he'll never be troubled by the sight of me again."

She got up. Lady Summerhay also rose.

"I hope you don't think—I really am only too anxious to——"

"I think it's better to be frank. You will never like me, or forgive me for ensnaring Bryan. And so it had better be, please,

as if I were his common mistress. That will be perfectly all right for both of us. It was very good of you to come, though. Thank you—and good-bye."

Lady Summerhay literally faltered away among the little tables and elaborate chairs, till her tall figure had disappeared behind a column. Gyp sat down again on the lounge, pressing her hands to her burning ears. The strength of the pride-demon within her; at the moment, it was almost stronger than her love! She was still sitting there when the page-boy brought her another visitor—Winton, elated at sight of her after this long absence. Having given her the news of Mildenham and little Gyp, he had looked at her steadily, and said:

"The coast'll be clear for you both down there, and at Bury Street, whenever you like to come. I shall regard this as your real marriage, Gyp. I shall have the servants in and make that plain."

A row as at family prayers—and Dad standing very straight: 'You will be so good in future as to remember——' 'I shall be obliged if you will,' and so on; Betty's round face pouting at being brought in with all the others; Markey's soft, inscrutable; Mrs. Markey's demure and goggling; the maids' rabbit-faces; old Pettance's carved grin: 'Ho! Mr. Bryn Summer'ay; he bought her 'orse, and so she's gone to 'em!' And she said:

"Darling, I don't know! It's awfully sweet of you. We'll see later."

Winton patted her hand. "We must stand up to them, you know, Gyp."

Gyp laughed.

That same night, across the strip of blackness between their beds, she said:

"Bryan, promise me something!"

"It depends. I know you too well."

"No; it's quite reasonable, and possible. Promise!"

"All right; if it is."

"I want you to let *me* take the lease of the Red House—let it be mine, the whole thing—let me pay for everything there."

"What's the point?"

"Only that I shall have a proper home of my own. I can't explain, but your mother's coming to-day made me feel I must."

"My child, how could I possibly live on *you* there? It's absurd!"

"You can pay for everything else; London—travelling—

clothes, if you like. We can make it square. It's not the money, of course. I only want to feel that if, at any moment, you don't need me any more, you can simply stop coming."

"That's brutal, Gyp."

"No; so many women lose men because they claim things of them. I don't want to lose you that way—that's all."

"That's silly, darling!"

"It's not. Men—and women, too—tug at chains. And when there is no chain——"

"Well then; let me take the house, and you can go away when you're tired of me." His voice sounded smothered, resentful; she could hear him turning and turning, as if angry with his pillows.

"No; I can't explain. But I really mean it."

"We're just beginning life together, and you talk as if you want to split it up. It hurts, Gyp, and that's all about it."

A dead silence followed, both lying quiet in the darkness, trying to get the better of each other by sheer listening. An hour passed before he sighed, and, feeling his lips on hers, she knew that she had won.

III

In the study the moonlight had reached her face; and still more memories came—of first days in this old house together.

Summerhay had damaged himself out hunting that first winter. The memory of nursing him was strangely pleasant, now that it was two years old. For convalescence they had gone to the Pyrenees—Argelès in March, all almond-blossom against the blue—a wonderful fortnight. In London on the way back they had their first awkward encounter, coming out of a theatre one evening. A woman's voice: "Why, Bryan! What ages!" His answer defensively drawled:

"Hallo! Diana!"

"Where are you nowadays? Why don't you come and see us?"

"Down in the country. I will, some time. Good-bye."

A tall girl—red-haired, with a wonderful white skin, and brown—yes, brown eyes; Gyp could see those eyes sweeping her up and down with a sort of burning-live curiosity. Then his hand was thrust under her arm.

"Come on, let's walk and get a cab."

Clear of the crowd, she pressed his hand, and said:

"Who was it?"

"A second cousin. Diana Leyton."

"Do you know her very well?"

"Oh yes—used to."

"And do you like her very much?"

"Rather!"

He looked round into her face, laughter bubbling behind his gravity. But to this day that tall girl with burning-white skin, burning-brown eyes, burning-red hair, was not quite a pleasant memory. After that night they did not hide their union, going wherever they wished, whether likely to meet people or not. Nothing was so easily ignored as Society when the heart was set on other things. And they were seldom in London. But she never lost the feeling that the ideal for her was not ideal for him. He ought to go into the world and meet people; ought not to be cut off from social pleasures and duties, and then some day feel that he owed his starvation to her. To go up to London every

day was too tiring, and she persuaded him to take a set of chambers in the Temple, and sleep there three nights a week. In spite of all his entreaties, she never went to those chambers, staying always at Bury Street when she came up. She would not risk making him feel that she was hanging round his neck. She wanted to keep herself so little a matter of course that he would hanker after her when he was away. And she never asked where he went or whom he saw. But, sometimes, she wondered whether he could still love her as he used to. Love such as hers—passionate, adoring, protective, longing to sacrifice itself, to give all that it had to him, yet secretly demanding all his love in return—for how could a proud woman love one who did not love her?—such love was always longing for a union more complete than was possible in a world where all things move and change. But against its grip she never dreamed of fighting. She made no reservations; all her eggs were in one basket, as her father's had been before her.

The moonlight shone full on the old bureau and a vase of tulips, giving the flowers colour that was not colour, as if they came from a world beyond human consciousness. It glinted on a bronze of old Voltaire, till he seemed to be smiling from the hollows of his eyes. Gyp turned the bust a little, to catch the light on its far cheek; a letter was disclosed between it and the oak. She drew it out.

"Dear Bryan,
"But *I* say—you *are* wasting yourself——"

She pushed it back under the bust, and got up, tempted to read the rest of that letter and see from whom it was. No! One did not read letters. But the full import of those few words struck into her: "Dear Bryan. But *I* say—you *are* wasting yourself." A woman's hand; but not his mother's, nor his sisters'—she knew their writings. Who had dared to say he was wasting himself? A letter in a chain of letters! An intimate correspondent, whose name she did not know, because—he had not told her! Wasting himself—on what?—on his life with her down here? Was he? She began searching her memory. Last Christmas vacation—that clear, cold, wonderful fortnight in Florence, he had been full of fun. May now! No memory since—of his old infectious gaiety! "But *I* say—you *are* wast-

ing yourself." Hatred flared up in her against the unknown woman who had said that thing—her ears burned. She longed to tear the letter; but the guarding bust seemed mocking her; and she turned with the thought: 'I'll go and meet him; I can't wait here.'

She walked out into the moonlit garden, and slowly down the whitened road towards the station. A magical, dewless night! She took a short cut through a beech clump. The moonbeams had stolen in, frosting the boles and boughs, casting a ghostly grey over the shadow-patterned beech-mast. Not a leaf moved in there, no living thing stirred. 'I'll bring him back through here,' she thought. And she waited at the far corner, where he must pass. The train came in; a car went whizzing by, a cyclist, the first foot-passenger, breaking into a run. It was he, and, calling out, she ran back into the shadow of the trees. He came rushing after her.

They sat down on a great root, and leaning against him, she said:

"Have you had a hard day?"

"Yes; got hung up by a late consultation; and old Leyton asked me to come and dine."

Under Gyp the ground seemed to give a little.

"The Leytons—Eaton Square? A big dinner?"

"No. Only the old people, and Bertie and Diana."

"Diana? The girl we met coming out of the theatre?"

"When? Oh—ah!—What a memory, Gyp!"

"Yes; it's good for things that interest me."

"Why? Did she interest you?"

Gyp looked up.

"Yes. Is she clever?"

"I suppose you might call her so."

"And in love with you?"

"Great Scott! Why?"

"Is it very unlikely? I am."

He began kissing her. And, closing her eyes, Gyp thought: 'If only that's not because he doesn't want to answer!' Then, for some minutes, they were silent.

"Answer me truly, Bryan. Do you never feel as if you were wasting yourself on me?"

She was certain of a quiver in his grip of her; but his face was open and serene, his voice teasing.

"Well, hardly ever! Aren't you funny, dear?"

"Promise to let me know when you've had enough of me."
"All right! But don't look for fulfilment in this life."
"I'm not so sure."
"I am."

IV

Coming down next morning, Summerhay went straight to his bureau; his mind was not at ease. "Wasting yourself!" What had he done with that letter of Diana's? He remembered Gyp's coming in just as he finished reading it. Searching the pigeonholes and drawers, moving everything that lay about, he twitched the bust—and the letter lay disclosed. He took it up with a sigh of relief:

"Dear Bryan,

"But *I* say—you *are* wasting yourself. Why, my dear, of course! *'Il faut se faire valoir!'* You have only one foot to put forward; the other is planted in I don't know what mysterious hole. One foot in the grave—at thirty! Really, Bryan! Pull it out. There's such a lot waiting for you. It's no good your telling me to mind my business. I'm speaking for everyone who knows you. We all feel the blight on the rose. Besides, you always were my favourite cousin, ever since I was five and you a horrid little bully of ten; and I simply hate to think of you going slowly down instead of quickly up. Oh! I know 'Damn the world!' But—are you? I should have thought it was 'damning' you! Enough! When are you coming to see us? I've read that book. The man seems to think love is nothing but passion, and passion always fatal. I wonder! Perhaps you know.

"Don't be angry with me for being such a grandmother.

"*Au revoir.*

"Your very good cousin,
"Diana Leyton."

He crammed the letter into his pocket. It must have lain two days under that bust! Had Gyp seen it? He looked at the bronze face; and the philosopher looked back from his hollow eyes, as if saying: 'What do you know of the human heart, my boy—your own, your mistress's, that girl's, or anyone's? A pretty dance the heart will lead you yet! Wrap it round, seal it, drop it in a drawer, and lock the drawer! To-morrow it will be out and skipping on its wrappings. Ho! Ho!' And Sum-

merhay thought: 'Old goat! You never had one!' In the room above, Gyp would still be standing as he had left her, putting the last touch to her hair—a man would be a scoundrel who, even in thought——! 'Hallo!' the eyes of the bust seemed saying: 'Pity! That's queer! Why not pity that red-haired girl, with the skin so white, and the eyes so burning brown!' Satan! Gyp had his heart; no one in the world could take it from her!

How he had loved her, did love her! She would always be what she had been to him. And the sage's mouth seemed to twist! 'Quite so, my dear! But the heart is very funny—very —capacious!' A sound made him turn.

Little Gyp was standing in the doorway.

"Hallo, Baryn!" She came flying to him, and stood on his knees with the sunlight shining on her fluffed-out hair.

"Well, Gipsy! Who's getting a tall girl?"

"I'm goin' to ride."

"Ho, ho!"

"Baryn, let's do Humpty-Dumpty!"

"All right!"

Gyp was still doing one of those hundred things which occupy women for a quarter of an hour after they are "quite ready," when those two came in, and at little Gyp's shout of, "Humpty!" she suspended her needle to watch the sacred rite.

Summerhay had seated himself on the foot-rail of the bed, rounding his arms, sinking his neck, blowing out his cheeks to simulate an egg, till with an unexpectedness that little Gyp could always see through, he rolled backward on to the bed.

Simulating "all the king's horses," she tried in vain to put him up again. This immemorial game, watched by Gyp a hundred times, had to-day a special preciousness. If he could be so ridiculously young, what became of her doubts? Looking at his face pulled this way and that, imperturbable under the pommelling of small fingers, she thought: 'And that girl dared to say he was *wasting himself!*' The tall girl with the white skin, the girl of the theatre—the Diana of his last night's dinner—it was she who had written those words! She was sure of it!

That afternoon, at the end of a long gallop on the downs, she turned her head away and said suddenly:

"Is she a huntress?"

"Who?"

"Your cousin—Diana."

In his laziest voice, he answered:

"I suppose you mean—does she hunt me?"

She knew that tone, that expression on his face, knew he was angry; but could not stop herself.

"I did."

"So you're going to become jealous, Gyp?"

At that cold, naked saying his heart sank, and hers quivered. She cantered on. When she reined in again, he glanced at her face and was afraid. It was closed up against him. He said softly:

"I didn't mean that, Gyp."

But she shook her head. He *had* meant to hurt her! And she said:

"Look at that long white cloud, and the apple-green in the sky—rain to-morrow. One ought to enjoy any fine day as if it were the last."

Uneasy, ashamed, yet still a little angry, Summerhay rode on beside her.

That night she cried in her sleep; and, when he awakened her, clung to him and sobbed out:

"Oh! I thought you'd left off loving me!"

For a long time he held and soothed her. Never! He would never leave off loving her!

But a cloud no broader than your hand can spread and cover the whole day.

V

The summer passed, with always a little patch of silence in her heart, and in his. The tall, bright days grew taller, slowly passed their zenith, slowly shortened. On Saturdays and Sundays, sometimes with Winton and little Gyp, but more often alone, they went on the river, which for Gyp had never lost the magic of their first afternoon upon it. All the week she looked forward to these hours with him, as if the surrounding water secured her against a world that would take him from her, if it could, and against that side of his nature, which, so long ago she had named "old Georgian." She had once adventured to the law courts, to see him in his wig and gown. Under that stiff grey crescent on his broad forehead, he seemed so hard and clever—so of a world to which she never could belong, a brilliant, bullying world. She only possessed and knew one side of him! On the river, she had him utterly to herself—lovable, lazy, impudently loving, lying with his head in her lap, plunging in for a swim, splashing round her; or plying his slow sculls down-stream, singing, "Away, my rolling river." It was blessed to lose for a few hours each week the growing consciousness that she could never have the whole of him. But all the time the patch of silence grew.

When the long vacation came, she heroically resolved that he must have a month away from her. While Betty was at the sea with little Gyp, she would take her father for his cure. She held inflexibly to this resolve, and, after many protests, he said with a shrug:

"Very well—if you're so keen to get rid of me."

Keen to get rid! She forced her feeling back, and said, smiling:

"At last! There's a good boy!" If only it would bring him back to her exactly as he had been. She asked no questions as to where, or to whom, he would go.

Tunbridge Wells, that charming purgatory where the retired prepare their souls for more permanent retirement, was dreaming on its hills in long rows of adequate villas. Its commons and woods had remained unscorched, so that the retired had not

to any extent deserted it for the sea. They still shopped in the Pantiles, strolled the uplands, or flourished their golf-clubs in the grassy parks; still drank tea in each other's houses and frequented the many churches. From every kind of life they had retired, and, waiting now for a more perfect day, were doing their utmost to postpone it.

Winton had rooms in a hotel where he could bathe and drink waters without having to climb hills. It was the first cure Gyp had attended since Wiesbaden, six years ago. She felt so utterly, so strangely different! Then life had been sparkling sips of every drink; now it was one long still draught, to quench a thirst unquenchable.

She lived for the post, and if, by any chance, she did not get her daily letter, her heart sank to the depths. She wrote every day, sometimes twice, then tore up the second letter, remembering why she had set herself to undergo this separation. During the first week, his letters had a certain equanimity; in the second, they became ardent; in the third, they were fitful—beginning to look forward, or moody and dejected; and they were shorter. During this third week Aunt Rosamund joined them. She was a staunch supporter of Gyp's new life, which, in her view, served Fiorsen right. She had a definitely low opinion of men, and a lower of the existing marriage-laws; any woman who struck a blow at them was something of a heroine, though in fact Gyp was quite guiltless of the desire to strike a blow. Aunt Rosamund's aristocratic and rebellious blood boiled with hatred of what she called the "stuffy people" who still held that women were men's property. It had made her specially careful never to put herself in that position.

She brought a piece of news.

"I was walking down Bond Street past that tea-and-tart shop, my dear—you know, where they have those special coffee creams, and who should come out of it but Miss Daphne Wing and our friend Fiorsen; and pretty hang-dog he looked. He came up to me, with his little lady watching him like a lynx. Really, my dear, I was rather sorry for him; he'd got that hungry look of his; she'd been doing all the eating, I'm sure. He asked me how you were.

"'When you see her,' he said, 'tell her I haven't forgotten her, and never shall. But she was quite right; this is the sort of lady that I'm fit for.' And the way he looked at that girl made me feel quite uncomfortable. Then he gave me one of his little

bows; and off they went, she as pleased as Punch. I really was half sorry for him."

Gyp said quietly:

"You needn't have been, Auntie; he'll always be able to be sorry for himself."

Aunt Rosamund was silent, a little shocked. The poor lady had not lived with Fiorsen!

That same afternoon Gyp was sitting in a shelter on the common, thinking her one long thought: 'To-day is Thursday! Eleven days—still!'—when three figures came toward her, a man, a woman, and what should have been a dog. Love of beauty and the rights of man had forced its nose back, deprived it of half its ears, and all but three inches of tail. It had asthma—and waddled. A voice said:

"This'll do, Maria. We can take the sun 'ere."

In that voice was the permanent cold hoarseness caught beside innumerable graves. Gyp recognised Mr. Wagge. He had taken off his beard, leaving side-whiskers, and Mrs. Wagge had filled out wonderfully. They settled down beside her.

"You sit here, Maria; you won't get the sun in your eyes."

"No, Robert; I'll sit here. You sit there."

"No, *you* sit there."

"No, *I* will. Come, Duckie!"

The dog, stock still on the pathway, was gazing at Gyp. Mr. Wagge followed the direction of its glance.

"Oh!" he said, "this is a surprise!" And fumbling at his straw hat, he passed his other hand over his sleeve and held it out. While she was shaking it, the dog moved forward and sat down on her feet. Mrs. Wagge also extended a shiny glove.

"This is a pleasure," she murmured. "Who *would* have thought of meeting you! Oh, don't let Duckie sit against your pretty frock! Come, Duckie!"

Duckie rested his back against Gyp's shinbones. Mr. Wagge said abruptly:

"You 'aven't come to live here, 'ave you?"

"Oh no! I'm only with my father for the baths."

"Ah! I thought not, never havin' seen you. We've been retired here ourselves a matter of twelve months. A pretty spot."

"Yes; lovely, isn't it?"

"We wanted nature. The air suits us, though a bit—er—too irony, as you might say. But it's a long-lived place. We were quite a time lookin' round."

Mrs. Wagge added:

"We'd thought of Wimbledon, but Mr. Wagge liked this better; he can get his walk, here; and it's more—select, perhaps. We have several friends. The church is very nice."

Mr. Wagge said bluffly:

"I was always chapel; but there's something in a place like this makes church seem more suitable; my wife always had a leaning that way. I never conceal my actions."

"It's a question of atmosphere, isn't it?"

Mr. Wagge shook his head.

"No; I don't hold with incense—we're not 'Igh Church. And how are *you,* ma'am? We often speak of you. You're looking well."

His face had become a dusky orange, Mrs. Wagge's the colour of a doubtful beetroot. The dog stirred, snuffled, and fell heavily against her legs again. She said quietly:

"I was hearing of Daisy to-day. She's quite a star now, isn't she?"

Mrs. Wagge sighed. Mr. Wagge looked away and answered:

"It's a sore subject. Making her forty and fifty pound a week, and run after in all the papers. A success—no doubt about it. Saving a matter of fifteen 'undred a year, I shouldn't be surprised. Why, at my best, the years the influenza was so bad, I never cleared a thousand nett. She's a success."

Mrs. Wagge added:

"Have you seen her last photograph—the one where she's standing between two hydrangea tubs? It was her own idea."

Mr. Wagge mumbled suddenly:

"I'm always glad to see her when she takes a run down in a car. But I've come here for quiet after the life I've led, and I don't want to think about it, especially before you, ma'am. I don't—and that's a fact."

A silence followed, during which Mr. and Mrs. Wagge looked at their feet, and Gyp looked at the dog.

"Ah!—here you are!" Winton had come up from behind the shelter. Gyp could not help a smile. Her father's weathered, narrow face, half-veiled eyes, thin nose, little crisp, grey moustache which did not hide his firm lips, his lean, erect figure; the very way he stood; his thin, dry, clipped voice, were the obsolute antithesis of Mr. Wagge's thickset, stoutly-planted form, thick-skinned, thick-featured face, thick, rather hoarse yet oily

were cut away. And yet it seemed a gleam in the blackness. She came in at the far end of the fields they called "the wild." Red already tinged the white cloud-banks, towered up in the east beyond the river; and peeping over that mountain-top was the moon, fleecy and unsubstantial in the flax-blue sky. All was wild colour. The oak-trees above the hedgerows had not lost their leaves, and in the rain-washed light had a sheen of old gold with heart of ivy-green; the half-stripped beeches flamed with copper; the russet tufts of the ash-trees glowed. And past Gyp, a single leaf blown off, went soaring, turning over, going up on the rising wind, up—up, into the sky, till it was lost—away.

The rain had drenched the grass, and she turned back. At the gate beside the linhay, a horse was standing. It whinnied to her. Hotspur, saddled, bridled, with no rider! Why? Where—? Then she undid the latch, ran through, and saw Summerhay lying in the mud—on his back, with eyes wide open, forehead and hair all blood. Some leaves had dropped on him. God! O God! His eyes had no sight, his lips no breath; his heart did not beat; the leaves had dropped even on his face—in the blood on his poor head. Gyp raised him—stiffened, cold as ice! She gave one cry, and fell, embracing his stiffened body with all her strength, kissing his lips, his eyes, his broken forehead; clasping, warming him, trying to pass life into him; till, at last, she too lay still, her lips on his cold lips, her body on his cold body in the mud and the fallen leaves, while the wind crept and rustled in the ivy, and went over with the scent of rain. Close by, the horse, uneasy, put his head down and sniffed at her, then, backing away, neighed, and broke into a wild gallop round the field. . . .

Old Pettance, waiting for Summerhay's return to stable up for the night, heard that distant neigh and went to the garden gate, screwing up his little eyes against the sunset. He could see a loose horse galloping down there in "the wild," where no horse should be, and thinking: 'There now; that artful devil's broke away from the guv'nor! Now I'll 'ave to ketch 'im!' he went back, got some oats, and set forth at the best gait of his stiff-jointed feet. The old horseman characteristically did not think of accidents. The guv'nor had got off, no doubt, to unhitch that heavy gate—the one you had to lift. That 'orse—he was a masterpiece of mischief! His difference with the animal still rankled in a mind that did not easily forgive.

Half an hour later, he entered the lighted kitchen, shaking and gasping, tears rolling down his furrowed cheeks into the corners of his gargoyle's mouth.

"O my Gord! Fetch the farmer—fetch an 'urdle! O my Gord! Betty, you and cook—I can't get 'er off him. She don't speak. I felt her—all cold. Come on, you sluts—quick! O my Gord! The poor guv'nor! That 'orse must 'a' galloped into the linhay and killed him. I've seed the marks on the devil's shoulder where he rubbed it scrapin' round the wall. Come on—come on! Fetch an 'urdle or she'll die there on him in the mud. Put the child to bed and get the doctor, and send a wire to London, to the major, to come sharp. Oh, blarst you all—keep your 'eads! What's the good o' howlin' and blubberin'!"

In the whispering corner of those fields, light from a lantern and the moon fell on the old stone linhay, on the ivy and the broken gate, on the mud, the golden leaves, and the two quiet bodies clasped together. Gyp's consciousness had flown; there seemed no difference between them. And presently, over the rushy grass, a procession moved back in the wind and the moonlight—two hurdles, two men carrying one, two women and a man the other, and, behind, old Pettance and the horse.

XI

Gyp recovered consciousness in her bed, and her first drowsy movement was towards her mate. With eyes still closed, she turned, and put out her hand to touch him before she dozed off again. No warmth, no substance; through her mind, still in the mists of morphia, thoughts passed vague and lonely: 'Ah, yes, in London!' She turned on her back. London! Something up there! She opened her eyes. So the fire had kept in all night! Someone in a chair, or—was she dreaming? And, suddenly, without knowing why, she began to gasp. The figure moved, turned her face in the firelight. Betty! Gyp closed her eyes. Icy sweat had broken out all over her.

"Betty!"

"Yes, my darlin'."

"What is it?"

"Don't 'ee think—don't 'ee think! Your Daddy'll be here directly, my sweetie!"

Gyp's eyes passed from the firelight and that rocking figure to the chink of light, hardly light as yet, at one corner of the curtain. Her tongue stole out and passed over her lips; beneath the bedclothes she folded both hands tight across her heart. Then she was not dead with him—not dead! Not gone back with him into the ground—not—— And suddenly there flickered up in her a flame. They were keeping her alive! Curse them!

"Betty, I'm so thirsty. Get me a cup of tea."

"Yes, my lovey, at once. It'll do you good. That's a brave girl."

The moment the door clicked to, Gyp sprang up. Her whole soul was alive with cunning. She ran to the wardrobe, seized her long fur coat, thrust her bare feet into her slippers, wound a piece of lace round her head, and opened the door. All dark, all quiet! Stifling the sound of her feet, she glided down the stairs, slipped back the chain of the front door, opened it, and fled. Like a shadow she passed across the grass, out of the garden gate, down the road under the black dripping trees. The beginning of light was mixing its grey hue into the darkness; she could just see her feet among the puddles on the road. She heard the whirring of a car on its top gear grinding up the hill,

and cowered away against the hedge. Its light came searching along, picking out with a mysterious momentary brightness the bushes and tree-trunks, making the wet road gleam. Gyp saw the chauffeur turn his head back at her, then the car's body passed up into darkness, and its tail-light vanished. A car going to the Red House with her father, or the doctor, helping to keep her alive! She flew on. A man with a dog came out of a gate, and called "Hallo!" She had lost her slippers, and ran with bare feet, unconscious of stones, or the torn-off branches strewing the road, making for the lane that ran down to the river, to the left of the inn, where the bank was free.

She turned into it; a hundred or more yards away, she could see the willows, the width of lighter grey that was the river. The river—and the happiest hours of all her life! If he were anywhere, she would find him there, where he had lain with his head on her breast; where she had dreamed, and seen beauty, and loved him so! She reached the bank. Cold, grey, silent, swifter than yesterday, the stream was flowing down, the shores brightening slowly in the dawn. Gyp stood motionless, gasping after her long run; her knees gave way. She sank down on the wet grass, clasping her arms round her drawn-up legs, rocking to and fro, with her hair loosened over her face. Her heart felt suffocated. She sat, waiting for breath—breath and strength to let life go, to slip down into the grey water. And that queer apartness from self, which is the property of fever, came on her, so that she seemed to see herself sitting there, waiting; and she thought: 'I shall see myself dead, floating among the reeds. I shall see the birds wondering above me!' And, suddenly, she broke into a storm of sobbing. Her boy—her boy—and his poor hair! And swaying over, she lay face down, clasping at the wet grass and the earth.

The sun laid a pale streak along the water; a robin twittered; a leaf fell on her bare ankle.

Winton, who had been hunting on Saturday, had returned to town on Sunday by the evening train, and gone straight to his club for supper. Falling asleep over his cigar, he had to be awakened when they desired to close the club for the night. It was past two when he reached Bury Street and found the telegram.

"Something dreadful happened to Mr. Summerhay. Come quick.—BETTY."

Never had he so cursed the loss of his hand as during the time that followed, when Markey had to dress, help his master, pack bags, and fetch a taxi equipped for so long a journey. At half-past three they started. Winton, wrapped in his fur coat, sat a little forward on his seat, ready to put his head through the window and direct the driver. It was a wild night; he would not let Markey, whose chest was not strong, go outside to act as guide. Twice that silent one had spoken.

"That'll be bad for Miss Gyp, sir."

"Bad, yes—terrible."

And later:

"D'you think it means he's dead, sir?"

"God knows, Markey! We must hope for the best."

Could Fate be cruel enough to deal one so soft and loving such a blow?

Betty and a maid were standing at the open garden gate, in the breaking darkness, wringing their hands. Leaping out, he cried:

"What is it, woman? Quick!"

"Oh, sir! My dear's gone. I left her a moment to get her a cup of tea. And she's run out in the cold!"

Winton stood for two seconds as if turned to stone. Then, taking Betty by the shoulder, he asked quietly:

"What happened to *him?*"

Betty could not answer, but the maid said:

"The horse killed him at that linhay, sir, down in 'the wild.' And the mistress was unconscious till quarter of an hour ago."

"Which way did she go?"

"Out here, sir; the door and the gate was open—can't tell which way."

The river!

"Turn the cab round! Stay in, Markey! Betty and you, girl, go down to 'the wild,' and search there at once. Yes? What is it?"

"As we came up the hill, sir, I see a lady or something in a long dark coat with white on her head, against the hedge."

"Right! Drive down again sharp, and use your eyes."

At such moments, thought is impossible. But of thought there was no need, for the gardens of villas and the inn blocked the river at all but one spot. Winton stopped the car where the narrow lane branched down to the bank, and ran. He ran silently on the grass edge, and Markey, imitating, ran behind.

When he came in sight of a black shape lying on the bank, he suffered a moment of intense agony, for he thought it was just a dark garment thrown away. Then he saw it move, and, holding up his hand for Markey to stand still, walked on, tiptoeing in the grass. Between that prostrate figure and the water he knelt down and said:

"My darling!"

Gyp raised her head and stared at him. Her white face, with eyes unnaturally dark and large, and hair falling all over it, was strange to him—the face of grief itself. And he knew not how to help, or comfort, or save. In her eyes was the look of a wild animal at the moment of its capture, and instinct made him say:

"I lost her just as cruelly, Gyp."

He saw the words reach her brain, and that wild look waver. Stretching out his arm, he drew her close to him till her cheek was against his, her shaking body against him, and kept murmuring:

"For my sake, Gyp; for my sake!"

When, with Markey's aid, he had got her to the cab, they took her, not back to the house, but to the inn. She was in high fever, and soon delirious. By noon, Aunt Rosamund and Mrs. Markey, summoned by telegram, had arrived; and the whole inn taken lest any noise should disturb her.

At five o'clock Winton was summoned to the little so-called reading-room. A tall woman was standing at the window, shading her eyes with the back of a gloved hand. Though they had lived so long within ten miles of each other, he only knew Lady Summerhay by sight, and he waited for her to speak first.

"There is nothing to say; only, I thought I must see you. How is she?"

"Delirious."

"My poor boy! Did you see him—his forehead? I will take him back home." Tears rolled one after the other slowly down her face under her veil. She had turned to the window, passing her handkerchief up under the veil. Staring at the little strip of darkening lawn, Winton said:

"I will send you all his things, except anything that might help my poor girl."

She turned.

"And so it's ended like this! Major Winton, is there anything behind—were they really happy?"

Winton looked straight at her and answered:

"Too happy!"

Without a quiver, he met those tear-darkened eyes straining at his; with a heavy sigh she once more turned away, drew down her veil, and hastened away.

It was not true—he knew from the mutterings of Gyp's fever—but no one, not even Summerhay's mother, should hear a whisper if he could help it.

In the days that followed, Gyp, robbed of memory, hung between life and death. Winton hardly left her room, that low room with creepered windows whence the river could be seen, gliding down under the pale November sunshine or black beneath the stars. He watched it, fascinated. He had snatched her from it as by a miracle.

He had refused to have a nurse. Aunt Rosamund and Mrs. Markey were skilled in sickness, and he could not bear that a strange person should listen to those delirious mutterings. His own part of the nursing was to sit and keep her secrets from the others—if he could. He would stay for hours, with eyes fixed on her face. No one could supply so well as he the thread of the familiar, by which the fevered, without knowing, perhaps find their way a little in the mazes where they wander.

He was astonished by the number of inquiries, even people whom he had considered enemies left cards or sent their servants. But the small folk touched him most by their genuine concern for one whose grace and softness had won their hearts. One morning he received a letter forwarded from Bury Street.

"Dear Major Winton,

"I have read a paragraph in the paper about poor Mr. Summerhay's death. And, oh, I feel so sorry for her! She was so good to me; I do feel it most dreadfully. If you think she would like to know how we all feel for her, you would tell her, wouldn't you? I do think it's cruel.

"Very faithfully yours,

"Daphne Wing."

So they knew Summerhay's name—he had not somehow expected that. He did not answer, not knowing what to say.

Sometimes he would cover his ears, to avoid hearing of that long stress of mind at which he had now and then glimpsed. Of the actual tragedy, her wandering spirit did not seem con-

scious; her lips were always telling her love, repeating the dread of losing his; except when they would give a whispering laugh, uncanny and enchanting, as at some gleam of perfect happiness. Those little laughs were worst of all to hear. He drew a gruesome comfort from the conclusion slowly forced on him. Summerhay's tragic death had cut short a situation which might have had an even more tragic issue. One night in the big chair at the side of her bed, he woke to see her eyes fixed on him. They saw, were her own eyes again. Her lips moved.

"Dad."

"Yes, my pet."

"I remember everything."

At that dreadful little saying, Winton leaned forward and put his lips to her hand, that lay outside the clothes.

"Where is he buried?"

"At Widrington."

"Yes."

It was rather a sigh than a word, and, raising his head, Winton saw her eyes closed again. The white transparency of her cheeks and forehead against the dark lashes and hair, was too startling. Was it a living face, or was its beauty that of death?

He bent over. She was breathing—asleep.

XII

The return to Mildenham was made by easy stages on New Year's day—Mildenham, dark, smelling the same, full of the ghosts of old days. For little Gyp, more than five years old now, and beginning to live, this was the pleasantest home yet. In watching her become the spirit of the place, as she herself had once been, Gyp found rest at times. She had not picked up much strength, and if her face was taken unawares, it was the saddest face. Her chief preoccupation was not being taken unawares. To Winton, her smile was almost as sad. He was at his wits' end about her that winter and spring. She made the utmost effort to keep up, and there was nothing to do but watch and wait. No use to force the pace. Time alone could heal—perhaps.

Spring came and passed, and physically she grew strong again; but she had never once gone outside the garden, never once spoken of the Red House, never once of Summerhay. Not that she cherished her grief; she appeared, rather, to do all in her power to forget and mask it. She only had what used to be called a broken heart. Little Gyp, who had been told that "Baryn" had gone away for ever, and that she must "never speak of him for fear of making Mum sad," would stand and watch her mother with puzzled gravity. She once remarked to Winton:

"Mum doesn't live with us, Grandy; she lives away somewhere, I think. Is it with Baryn?"

"Perhaps it is, sweetheart; but don't say that to anybody but me. Don't ever talk of Baryn to anyone else."

"Yes, I know; but where is he, Grandy?"

What could Winton answer?

He rode a great deal with the child, who, like her mother before her, was never so happy as in the saddle; but to Gyp he did not dare suggest it. She never spoke of horses, never went to the stables, passed all the days doing little things about the house, gardening, and sitting at her piano, sometimes playing a little, or merely looking at the keys, her hands clasped in her lap. This was early in the fateful summer, before any as yet felt the world-tremors, or saw the darkness beginning to gather. He

often thought: 'If only she had something to take her out of herself!'

In June he proposed a visit to London. To his surprise, she acquiesced at once. They went up in Whit-week. Passing Widrington, he forced himself to a spurt of talk; but later, glancing stealthily round his paper, he saw her face turned to the fields and tears rolling down it. She made no sound, no movement; only, those tears kept rolling down. And, behind his paper, Winton's eyes narrowed and retreated; his face hardened till the skin seemed tight drawn over the bones.

From the station to Bury Street the cab went by narrow by-streets, where the misery of the world was on show—ill-looking men, draggled, over-driven women, jaunty ghosts of little children in gutters and on doorsteps proclaiming by their clay-coloured faces and underfed bodies, the post-datement of the millennium. The lean and smutted houses had a look of dissolution indefinitely put off; there was no more trace of beauty than in a sewer. Gyp sat leaning forward, and Winton felt her hand slip into his.

That evening after dinner—in the room he had furnished for her mother, where the satinwood chairs, the little Jacobean bureau, the old brass candelabra were still as they had been nearly thirty years ago—she said:

"Dad, would you mind if I could make a sort of home at Mildenham for poor children to come and get good air and food?"

Strangely moved by the first wish he had heard her express since the tragedy, Winton said:

"My dear, are you strong enough?"

"Quite. There's nothing wrong with me now except here." She touched her heart. "What's given, one can't get back. I would if I could. It's been so dreadful for you. But if I had them to see after, I shouldn't be able to think so much; the more I had to do, the better. I should like to begin it at once."

Winton nodded. Anything that could do her good—anything!

"Rosamund'll help you find 'em," he muttered. "She's first-rate at all that sort of thing." Then, looking at her fixedly, he added: "Courage, my soul; it'll all come back some day."

Gyp forced herself to smile.

"And yet," she said, very quietly, "I wouldn't have been without it."

Her hands were clasped in her lap, her eyes shone strangely, the faint smile still hovered on her lips. And Winton thought: 'Love! Beyond measure—beyond death!'

1915.

BOOK III

SAINT'S PROGRESS

"He but usurp'd his life"
—Lear

TO

C. S. EVANS

PART I

I

Such a day made glad the heart. All the flags of July were waving; the sun and the poppies flaming; white butterflies spiring up and twining, and the bees busy on the snapdragons. The lime-trees were coming into flower. Tall white lilies in the garden beds already rivalled the delphiniums; the York and Lancaster roses were full-blown round their golden hearts. There was a gentle breeze, and a swish and stir and hum rose and fell above the head of Edward Pierson, coming back from his lonely ramble over Tintern Abbey. He had arrived at Kestrel, his brother Robert's home on the bank of the Wye only that morning, having stayed at Bath on the way down; and now he had got his face burnt in that parti-coloured way peculiar to the faces of those who have been too long in London. As he came along the narrow, rather overgrown avenue, the sound of a waltz thrummed out on a piano fell on his ears, and he smiled, for music was the greatest passion he had. His dark grizzled hair was pushed back off his hot brow, which he fanned with his straw hat. Though not broad, that brow was the broadest part of a narrow oval face whose length was increased by a short, dark, pointed beard—a visage such as Vandyk might have painted, grave and gentle, but for its bright grey eyes, cinder-lashed and crow's-footed, and its strange look of not seeing what was before it. He walked quickly, though he was tired and hot; tall, upright, and thin, in a grey parsonical suit, on whose black kerseymere vest a little gold cross dangled.

Above his brother's house, whose sloping garden ran down to the railway line and river, a large room had been built out apart. Pierson stood where the avenue forked, enjoying the sound of the waltz, and the cool whipping of the breeze in the sycamores and birches. A man of fifty, with a sense of beauty, born and bred in the country, suffers fearfully from nostalgia during a long unbroken spell of London; so that his afternoon in the old Abbey had been almost holy. He had let his senses

sink into the sunlit greenery of the towering woods opposite; he had watched the spiders and the little shining beetles, the fly-catchers, and sparrows in the ivy; touched the mosses and the lichens; looked the speedwells in the eye; dreamed of he knew not what. A hawk had been wheeling up there above the woods, and he had been up there with it in the blue. He had taken a real spiritual bath, and washed the dusty fret of London off his soul.

For a year he had been working his parish single-handed—his curate having gone for a chaplain; and this was his first real holiday since the war began, two years ago; his first visit, too, to his brother's home. He looked down at the garden, and up at the trees of the avenue. Bob had found a perfect retreat after his quarter of a century in Ceylon. Dear old Bob! And he smiled at the thought of his elder brother, whose burnt face and fierce grey whiskers somewhat recalled a Bengal tiger; the kindest fellow that ever breathed! Yes, he had found a perfect home for Thirza and himself. And Edward Pierson sighed. He too had once had a perfect home, a perfect wife; the wound of whose death, fifteen years ago, still bled a little in his heart. Their two daughters, Gratian and Noel, had not "taken after" her; Gratian was like his own mother, and Noel's fair hair and big grey eyes always reminded him of his cousin Leila, who —poor thing!—had made that sad mess of her life, and now, he had heard, was singing for a living, in South Africa. Ah! What a pretty girl she had been!

Drawn by that eternal waltz tune he reached the doorway of the music-room. A chintz curtain hung there, and to the sound of feet slipping on polished boards, he saw his daughter Noel waltzing slowly in the arms of a young officer in khaki. Round and round they went, circling, backing, moving sideways with curious steps which seemed to have come in recently, for he did not recognise them. At the piano sat his niece Eve, with a teasing smile on her rosy face. But it was at his young daughter that Edward Pierson looked. Her eyes were half-closed, her cheeks rather pale, and her fair hair, cut quite short, curled into her slim round neck. Quite cool she seemed, though the young man in whose arms she was gliding along looked fiery hot; a handsome boy, with blue eyes and a little golden down on the upper lip of his sunny red-cheeked face. Edward Pierson thought: 'Nice couple!' And had a moment's vision of himself and Leila, dancing at that long-ago Cambridge May

Week—on her seventeenth birthday, he remembered, so that she must have been a year younger than Nollie was now! This would be the young man she had talked of in her letters during the last three weeks. Were they never going to stop?

He passed into view of those within, and said:

"Aren't you very hot, Nollie?"

She blew him a kiss; the young man looked startled and self-conscious, and Eve called out:

"It's a bet, Uncle. They've got to dance me down."

Pierson said mildly:

"A bet? My dears!"

Noel murmured over her shoulder:

"It's all right, Daddy!" And the young man gasped:

"She's bet us one of her puppies against one of mine, sir!"

Pierson sat down, a little hypnotised by the sleepy strumming, the slow giddy movement of the dancers, and those half-closed swimming eyes of his young daughter, looking at him over her shoulder as she went by. He sat with a smile on his lips. Nollie was growing up! Now that Gratian was married, she had become a great responsibility. If only his dear wife had lived! The smile faded from his lips; he looked suddenly very tired. The struggle, physical and spiritual, he had been through, these fifteen years, sometimes weighed him almost to the ground. Most men would have married again, but he had always felt it would be sacrilege. Unions were for ever, real, though the Church permitted remarriage.

He watched his young daughter with a mixture of æsthetic pleasure and perplexity. Could this be good for her? But they looked very happy; and there was so much in young creatures that he did not understand. Noel, so affectionate, and dreamy, seemed sometimes possessed of a little devil. Edward Pierson attributed those outbursts of demonic possession to the loss of her mother when she was such a mite; for Gratian, only two years older, had never taken a mother's place. That had been left to himself, and he was more or less conscious of failure.

He sat there looking up at her with whimsical distress. And, suddenly, in that dainty voice of hers, which seemed to spurn each word a little, she said:

"I'm going to stop!" and, sitting down beside him, took up his hat to fan herself.

Eve struck a triumphant chord. "Hurrah! I've won!"

The young man muttered:

"I say, Noel, we weren't half done!"

"I know; but Daddy was getting bored, weren't you, dear? This is Cyril Morland."

Pierson shook the young man's hand.

"Daddy, your nose is burnt!"

"My dear; I know."

"I can give you some white stuff for it. You have to sleep with it on all night. Uncle and Auntie both use it."

"Nollie!"

"Well, Eve says so. If you're going to bathe, Cyril, look out for that current!"

The young man, gazing at her with undisguised adoration, muttered:

"Rather!" and went out.

Noel's eyes lingered after him; Eve broke a silence.

"If you're going to have a bath before tea, Nollie, you'd better hurry up."

"All right. Was it jolly in the Abbey, Daddy?"

"Lovely; like a great piece of music."

"Daddy always puts everything into music. You ought to see it by moonlight; it's gorgeous then. All right, Eve; I'm coming." But she did not get up, and when Eve was gone, cuddled her arm through her father's and murmured:

"What d'you think of Cyril?"

"My dear, how can I tell? He seems a nice-looking young man."

"All right, Daddy; don't strain yourself. It's jolly down here, isn't it?" She got up, stretched herself a little, and moved away, looking like a very tall child, with her short hair curling in round her head.

Pierson, watching her vanish past the curtain, thought: 'What a lovely thing she is!' And he got up too, but instead of following, went to the piano, and began to play Mendelssohn's Prelude and Fugue in E minor. He had a fine touch, and played with a sort of dreamy passion. It was his way out of perplexities, regrets, and longings; a way which never quite failed him.

At Cambridge, he had intended to take up music as a profession, but family tradition had destined him for Holy Orders, and an emotional Church revival of that day had caught him in its stream. He had always had private means, and those early years before he married had passed happily in an East-

End parish. To have not only opportunity but power to help in the lives of the poor had been fascinating; simple himself, the simple folk of his parish had taken hold of his heart. When, however, he married Agnes Heriot, he was given a parish of his own on the borders of East and West, where he had been ever since, even after her death had nearly killed him. It was better to go on where work and all reminded him of one whom he had resolved never to forget in other ties. But he knew that his work had not the zest it used to have in her day, or even before her day. It may well be doubted whether he, who had been in Holy Orders twenty-six years, quite knew now what he believed. Everything had become circumscribed, and fixed, by thousands of his own utterances; to have taken fresh stock of his faith, to have gone deep into its roots, would have been like taking up the foundations of a still-standing house. Some men naturally root themselves in the inexpressible—for which one formula is much the same as another; though Edward Pierson undoubtedly preferred his High-Church dogma to that of, say, the Zoroastrians. The subtleties of change, the modifications by science, left little sense of inconsistency or treason on his soul. Sensitive, charitable, and only combative deep down, he instinctively avoided discussion on matters where he might hurt others or they hurt him. And, since explanation was the last thing which could be expected of one who did not base himself on Reason, he had found but scant occasion ever to examine anything. Just as in the old Abbey he had soared off into the infinite with the hawk, the beetles, and the grasses, so now, at the piano, by these sounds of his own making, he was caught away again into emotionalism, without realising that he was in one of his most religious moods.

"Aren't you coming to tea, Edward?"

The woman standing behind him, in a lilac-coloured gown, had one of those faces which remain innocent to the end of the chapter, in spite of the complete knowledge of life which appertains to mothers. In days of suffering and anxiety, like these of the great war, Thirza Pierson was a valuable person. Without ever expressing an opinion on cosmic matters, she reconfirmed certain cosmic truths, such as that though the whole world was at war, there *was* such a thing as peace; that though all the sons of mothers were being killed, there remained such a thing as motherhood; that while everybody was living for the future, the present still existed. Her tranquil, tender, matter-of-fact

busyness, and the dew in her eyes, had been proof against twenty-three years of life on a tea-plantation in the hot part of Ceylon; against Bob Pierson; against the anxiety of having two sons at the front, and the confidences of nearly every one she came across. Nothing disturbed her. She was like a painting of "Goodness" by an Old Master, restored by Kate Greenaway. She never went to meet life, but when it came, made the best of it. This was her secret, and Pierson always felt rested in her presence.

He rose, and moved by her side, over the lawn, towards the big tree at the bottom of the garden.

"How d'you think Noel is looking, Edward?"

"Very pretty. That young man, Thirza?"

"Yes; I'm afraid he's over head and ears in love with her."

At the dismayed sound he uttered, she slipped her soft round arm within his. "He's going to the front soon, poor boy!"

"Have they talked to you?"

"He has. Not Nollie."

"Nollie is a queer child, Thirza."

"Nollie is a darling, but rather a desperate character, Edward."

Pierson sighed.

Under the tree, where the tea-things were set out, the "rather desperate character" was sitting in a swing. "What a picture she is!" he said, and sighed again.

The voice of his brother came to them, high and steamy, as though corrupted by the climate of Ceylon:

"You incorrigible dreamy chap, Ted! We've eaten all the raspberries. Eve, give him some jam; he must be dead! Phew! the heat! Come on, my dear, and pour out his tea. Hallo, Cyril! Had a good bathe? By George, wish *my* head was wet! Squattez-vous down over there, by Nollie; she'll swing, and keep the flies off you."

"Give me a cigarette, Uncle Bob——"

"What! Your father doesn't——"

"Just for the flies. You don't mind, Daddy?"

"Not if it's necessary, my dear."

Noel smiled, showing her upper teeth, and her eyes seemed to swim under their long lashes.

"It isn't necessary, but it's nice."

"Ah, ha!" said Bob Pierson. "Here you are, Nollie!"

But Noel shook her head. At that moment she struck her father as startlingly grown-up—so composed, swaying above that young man at her feet, whose sunny face was all adoration. 'No longer a child!' he thought. 'Dear Nollie!'

II

1 §

Awakened by that daily cruelty, the advent of hot water, Edward Pierson lay in his chintz-curtained room, fancying himself back in London. A wild bee hunting honey from the bowl of flowers on the window-sill, and the scent of sweetbrier, shattered that illusion. He drew the curtain, and, kneeling on the window-seat, thrust his head out into the morning. The air was intoxicatingly sweet. Haze clung over the river and the woods beyond; the lawn sparkled with dew, and two wagtails strutted in the dewy sunshine. 'Thank God for loveliness!' he thought. 'Those poor boys at the front!' And kneeling with his elbows on the sill, he began to say his prayers. The same feeling which made him beautify his church, use vestments, good music, and incense, filled him now. God was in the loveliness of His world, as well as in His churches. One could worship Him in a grove of beech-trees, in a beautiful garden, on a high hill, by the banks of a bright river. God was in the rustle of the leaves, and the hum of a bee, in the dew on the grass, and the scent of flowers; God was in everything! And he added to his usual prayer this whisper: "I give Thee thanks for my senses, O Lord. In all of us, keep them bright, and grateful for beauty." Then he remained motionless, prey to a sort of happy yearning very near to melancholy. Great beauty ever had that effect on him. One could capture so little of it—could never enjoy it enough! Who was it had said not long ago: "Love of beauty is really only the sex instinct, which nothing but complete union satisfies." Ah! yes, George—Gratian's husband. George Laird! And a little frown came between his brows, as though at some thorn in the flesh. Poor George! But then, all doctors were materialists at heart—splendid fellows, though; a fine fellow, George, working himself to death out there in France. One must not take them too seriously. He plucked a bit of sweetbrier and put it to his nose, which still retained the shine of that bleaching ointment Noel had insisted on his using. The sweet smell of those little rough leaves stirred up an acute aching. He

dropped them, and drew back. No longings, no melancholy; one ought to be out, this beautiful morning!

It was Sunday; but he had not to take three Services and preach at least one sermon; this day of rest was really to be his own, for once. It was almost disconcerting; he had so long felt like the cab horse who could not be taken out of the shafts lest he should fall down. He dressed with deliberation, and had not quite finished when there came a knock on his door, and Noel's voice said: "Can I come in, Daddy?"

In her flax-blue frock, with a Gloire de Dijon rose pinned where it met on her faintly browned neck, she seemed to her father a perfect vision of freshness.

"Here's a letter from Gratian; George has been sent home ill, and he's gone to our house. She's got leave from her hospital to come home and nurse him.

Pierson read the letter. "Poor George!"

"When are you going to let me be a nurse, Daddy?"

"We must wait till you're eighteen, Nollie."

"I could easily say I was. It's only a month; and I look much more."

Pierson smiled.

"Don't I?"

"You might be anything from fifteen to twenty-five, my dear, according as you behave."

"I want to go out as near the front as possible."

Her head was poised so that the sunlight framed her face, which was rather broad—the brow rather too broad—under the waving light-brown hair, the nose short and indeterminate; cheeks still round from youth, almost waxen-pale, and faintly hollowed under the eyes. It was her lips, dainty yet loving, and above all her grey eyes, big and dreamily alive, which made her a swan. He could not imagine her in nurse's garb.

"This is new, isn't it, Nollie?"

"Cyril Morland's sisters are both out; and he'll be going soon. Everybody goes."

"Gratian hasn't got out yet. It takes a long time to get trained."

"I know; all the more reason to begin."

She got up, looked at him, looked at her hands, seemed about to speak, but did not. A little colour had come into her cheeks. Then, obviously making conversation, she asked:

"Are you going to church? It's worth anything to hear Uncle

Bob read the Lessons, especially when he loses his place. No; you're not to put on your long coat till just before church time. I won't have it!"

Obediently Pierson resigned his long coat.

"Now, you see, you can have my rose. Your nose *is* better!" She kissed his nose, and transferred her rose to the buttonhole of his short coat. "That's all. Come along!" And with her arm through his, they went down. But he knew she had come to say something which she had not said.

2 §

Bob Pierson, in virtue of greater wealth than the rest of the congregation, always read the Lessons, in his high steamy voice, his breathing never adjusted to the length of any period. The congregation, accustomed, heard nothing peculiar; he was the necessary gentry with the necessary finger in the pie. It was his own family whom he perturbed. In the second row, Noel, staring solemnly at the profile of her father in the front row, was thinking: 'Poor Daddy! His eyes look as if they were coming out. Oh, Daddy! Smile! or it'll hurt you!' Young Morland beside her, rigid in his tunic, was thinking: 'She isn't thinking of me!' And just then her little finger crooked into his. Edward Pierson was thinking: 'Oh! My dear old Bob! Oh!' And, beside him, Thirza thought: 'Poor dear Ted! how nice for him to be having a complete rest! I must make him eat—he's so thin!' And Eve was thinking: 'Oh, Father! Mercy!' But Bob Pierson was thinking: 'Cheer oh! Only another three verses!' Noel's little finger unhooked itself, but her eyes stole round to young Morland's eyes, and there was a light in them which lingered through the singing and the prayers. At last, in the reverential rustle of the settling congregation, a surpliced figure mounted the pulpit.

"I come not to bring Peace, but a sword."

Pierson looked up. He felt deep restfulness. There was a pleasant light in this church; the hum of a country bluebottle made all the difference to the quality of silence. No critical thought stirred within him, nor any excitement. He was thinking: 'Now I shall hear something for my good; a fine text; when did I preach from it last?' Turned a little away from the others, he saw nothing but the preacher's homely face up there above the carved oak; it was so long since he had been

preached to, so long since he had had a rest! The words came forth, dropped on his forehead, penetrated, met something which absorbed them, and disappeared. 'A good plain sermon!' he thought. 'I suppose I'm stale; I don't seem——' "Let us not, dear brethren," droned the preacher's earnest voice, "think that our dear Lord, in saying that He brought a sword, referred to a physical sword. It was the sword of the spirit to which He was undoubtedly referring, that bright sword of the spirit which in all ages has cleaved its way through the fetters imposed on men themselves by their own desires, imposed by men on other men in gratification of their ambitions, as we have had so striking an example in the invasion by our cruel enemies of a little neighbouring country which had done them no harm. Dear brethren, we may all bring swords." Pierson's chin jerked; he raised his hand quickly and passed it over his face. 'All bring swords,' he thought, 'swords—I wasn't asleep—surely!' "But let us be sure that our swords are bright; bright with hope, and bright with faith, that we may see them flashing among the carnal desires of this mortal life, carving a path for us towards that heavenly kingdom where alone is peace, perfect peace. Let us pray."

Pierson did not shut his eyes; he opened them as he fell on his knees. In the seat behind, Noel and young Morland had also fallen on their knees their faces covered each with a single hand; but her left hand and his right hung at their sides. They prayed a little longer than any others and, on rising, sang the hymn a little louder.

3 §

No paper came on Sundays—not even the local paper, which had so long and so nobly done its bit with head-lines to win the war. No news whatever came, of men blown up, to enliven the hush of the hot July afternoon, or the sense of drugging which followed Aunt Thirza's Sunday lunch. Some slept, some thought they were awake; but Noel and young Morland walked upward through the woods towards a high common of heath and furze, crowned by what was known as Kestrel rocks. Between these two young people no actual word of love had yet been spoken. Their lovering had advanced by glance and touch alone.

Young Morland was a school and college friend of the two Pierson boys now at the front. He had no home of his own,

for his parents were dead; and this was not his first visit to Kestrel. Arriving three weeks ago, for his final leave before he should go out, he had found a girl sitting in a little wagonette outside the station, and had known his fate at once. But who knows when Noel fell in love? She was—one supposes—just ready for that sensation. For the last two years she had been at one of those high-class finishing establishments where, in spite of the healthy curriculum, perhaps because of it, there is ever an undercurrent of interest in the opposing sex; and not even the gravest efforts to eliminate instinct are quite successful. The disappearance of every young male thing into the maw of the military machine put a premium on instinct. The thoughts of Noel and her school companions were turned, perforce, to that which, in pre-war freedom of opportunity they could afford to regard as of secondary interest. Love and Marriage and Motherhood, fixed as the lot of women by the countless ages, were threatened for these young creatures. They not unnaturally pursued what they felt to be receding.

When young Morland showed, by following her about with his eyes, what was happening to him, Noel was pleased. From being pleased, she became a little excited; from being excited she became dreamy. Then, about a week before her father's arrival, she secretly began to follow the young man about with *her* eyes; became capricious too, and a little cruel. If there had been another young man to favour—but there was not; and she favoured Uncle Bob's red setter. Cyril Morland grew desperate. During those three days the demon her father dreaded certainly possessed her. And then, one evening, while they walked back together from the hay-fields, she gave him a sidelong glance; and he gasped out: "Oh! Noel, what have I done?" She caught his hand, and gave it a quick squeeze. What a change! What blissful alteration ever since! . . .

Through the wood young Morland mounted silently, screwing himself up to put things to the touch. Noel too mounted silently, thinking: 'I will kiss him if he kisses me!' Eagerness, and a sort of languor, were running in her veins; she did not look at him from under her shady hat. Sunlight poured down through every chink in the foliage; made the greenness of the steep wood marvellously vivid and alive; flashed on beech leaves, ash leaves, birch leaves; fell on the ground in little runlets; painted bright patches on trunks and grass, the beech mast, the ferns; butterflies chased each other in that sunlight, and myriads

of ants and gnats and flies seemed possessed by a frenzy of life. The whole wood seemed possessed, as if the sunshine were a happy Being which had come to dwell therein. At a half-way spot, where the trees opened and they could see, far below them, the gleam of the river, she sat down on the bole of a beech-tree, and young Morland stood looking at her. Why should one face and not another, this voice and not that, make a heart beat; why should a touch from one hand awaken rapture, and a touch from another awaken nothing? He knelt down and pressed his lips to her foot. Her eyes grew very bright; but she got up and ran on—she had not expected him to kiss her foot. She heard him hurrying after her, and stopped, leaning against a birch trunk. He rushed to her, and, without a word spoken, his lips were on her lips. The moment in life, which no words can render, had come for them. They had found their enchanted spot, and they moved no further, but sat with their arms round each other, while the happy Being of the wood watched. A marvellous speeder-up of Love is War. What might have taken six months, was thus accomplished in three weeks.

A short hour passed, then Noel said:

"I must tell Daddy, Cyril. I meant to tell him something this morning, only I thought I'd better wait, in case you didn't."

Morland answered: "Oh, Noel!" It was the staple of his conversation while they sat there.

Again a short hour passed, and Morland said:

"I shall go off my chump if we're not married before I go out."

"How long does it take?"

"No time, if we hurry up. I've got six days before I rejoin, and perhaps the Chief will give me another week, if I tell him."

"Poor Daddy! Kiss me again; a long one."

When the long one was over, she said:

"Then I can come and be near you till you go out? Oh, Cyril!"

"Oh, Noel!"

"Perhaps you won't go so soon. Don't go if you can help it!"

"Not if I can help it, darling; but I shan't be able."

"No, of course not; I know."

Young Morland clutched his hair. "Everyone's in the same boat, but it can't last for ever; and now we're engaged we can be together all the time till I've got the licence or whatever it is. And then——!"

"Daddy won't like our not being married in a church; but I don't care!"

Looking down at her closed eyes, and their lashes resting on her cheeks, young Morland thought: 'My God! I'm in heaven!'

Another short hour passed before she freed herself.

"We must go, Cyril. Kiss me once more!"

It was nearly dinner-time, and they ran down.

4 §

Edward Pierson, returning from the Evening Service, where he had read the Lessons, saw them in the distance, and compressed his lips. Their long absence had vexed him. What ought he to do? In the presence of Love's young dream, he felt strange and helpless. That night, when he opened the door of his room, he saw Noel on the window-seat, in her dressing-gown, with the moonlight streaming in on her.

"Don't light up, Daddy; I've got something to say."

She took hold of the little gold cross on his vest, and turned it over.

"I'm engaged to Cyril; we want to be married this week."

It was exactly as if someone had punched him in the ribs; and at the sound he made she hurried on:

"You see, we *must* be; he may be going out any day."

In the midst of his aching consternation, he admitted a kind of reason in her words. But he said:

"My dear, you're only a child. Marriage is the most serious thing in life; you've only known him three weeks."

"I know all that, Daddy——" her voice sounded so ridiculously calm; "but we can't afford to wait. He might never come back, you see, and then I should have missed him."

"But, Noel, suppose he never did come back; it would only be much worse for you."

She dropped the little cross, and took hold of his hand, pressing it against her heart. But still her voice was calm:

"No; much better, Daddy; you think I don't know my own feelings, but I do."

The man in Pierson softened; the priest hardened.

"Nollie, true marriage is the union of souls; and for that, time is wanted. Time to know that you feel and think the same, and love the same things."

"Yes, I know; but we do."

"You can't tell that, my dear; no one could in three weeks."

"But these aren't ordinary times, are they? People have to do things in a hurry. Oh, Daddy! Be an angel! Mother would have understood, and let me, I know!"

Pierson drew away his hand; the words hurt, from reminder of his loss, from reminder of the poor substitute he was.

"Look, Nollie!" he said. "After all these years since she left us, I'm as lonely as ever, because we were really one. If you marry this young man without knowing more of your own hearts than you can in such a little time, you may regret it dreadfully; you may find it turn out, after all, nothing but a little empty passion; or again, if anything happens to him before you've had any real married life together, you'll have a much greater grief and sense of loss to put up with than if you simply stay engaged till after the war. Besides, my child, you're much too young."

She sat so still that he looked at her in alarm.

"But I must!"

He bit his lips, and said sharply: "You can't, Nollie!"

She got up, and before he could stop her, was gone. With the closing of the door, his anger evaporated, and distress took its place. Poor child! What to do with this wayward chicken just out of the egg, and wanting to be full-fledged at once? The thought that she would be lying miserable, crying, perhaps, beset him so that he went out into the passage and tapped on her door. Getting no answer, he went in. It was dark but for a streak of moonlight, and in that he saw her, lying on her bed, face down; and stealing up laid his hand on her head. She did not move; and, stroking her hair, he said gently:

"Nollie dear, I didn't mean to be harsh. If I were your mother, I should know how to make you see, but I'm only an old bumble-daddy."

She rolled over, scrambling into a cross-legged posture on the bed. He could see her eyes shining. But she did not speak; she seemed to know that in silence was her strength.

He said with a sort of despair:

"You must let me talk it over with your aunt. She has a lot of good sense."

"Yes."

He bent over and kissed her hot forehead.

"Good night, my dear; don't cry. Promise me!"

She nodded, and lifted her face; he felt her hot soft lips on his forehead, and went away a little comforted.

But Noel sat on her bed, hugging her knees, listening to the night, to the emptiness and silence; each minute—so much lost of the little, little time left, that she might have been with *him*.

III

Pierson woke after a troubled and dreamful night, in which he had thought himself wandering in heaven like a lost soul.

After regaining his room last night nothing had struck him more forcibly than the needlessness of his words: "Don't cry, Nollie!" for he had realised with uneasiness that she had not been near crying. No; there was in her some emotion very different from the tearful. He kept seeing her cross-legged figure on the bed in that dim light; tense, enigmatic, almost Chinese; kept feeling the feverish touch of her lips. A good girlish burst of tears would have done her good, and been a guarantee. He had the uncomfortable conviction that his refusal had passed her by, as if unspoken. And, since he could not go and make music at that time of night, he had ended on his knees, in a long search for guidance, which was not vouchsafed him.

The culprits were demure at breakfast; no one could have told that for the last hour they had been sitting with their arms round each other, watching the river flow by, talking but little, through lips too busy. Pierson pursued his sister-in-law to the room where she did her flowers every morning. He watched her for a minute dividing ramblers from pansies, cornflowers from sweet peas, before he said:

"I'm very troubled, Thirza. Nollie came to me last night. Imagine! They want to get married—those two!"

Accepting life as it came, Thirza showed no dismay, but her cheeks grew a little pinker, and her eyes a little rounder. She took up a sprig of mignonette, and said placidly:

"Oh, my dear!"

"Think of it, Thirza—that child! Why, it's only a year or two since she used to sit on my knee and tickle my face with her hair."

Thirza went on arranging her flowers.

"Noel is older than you think, Edward; she is more than her age. And real married life wouldn't begin for them till after—if it ever began."

Pierson experienced a sort of shock. His sister-in-law's words seemed criminally light-hearted.

"But—but——" he stammered; "the union, Thirza! Who can tell what will happen before they come together again!"

She looked at his quivering face, and said gently:

"I know, Edward; but if you refuse, I should be afraid, in these days, of what Noel might do. I told you there's a streak of desperation in her."

"Noel will obey me."

"I wonder! There are so many of these war marriages now."

Pierson turned away.

"I think they're dreadful. What do they mean—just a momentary gratification of passion. They might just as well not be."

"They mean pensions, as a rule," said Thirza calmly.

"Thirza, that is cynical; besides, it doesn't affect this case. I can't bear to think of my little Nollie giving herself for a moment which may come to nothing, or may turn out the beginning of an unhappy marriage. Who is this boy—what is he? I know nothing of him. How can I give her to him—it's impossible! If they had been engaged some time and I knew something of him—yes, perhaps; even at her age. But this hasty passionateness—it isn't right, it isn't decent. I don't understand, I really don't—how a child like that can want it. The fact is, she doesn't know what she's asking, poor little Nollie. She can't know the nature of marriage, and she can't realise its sacredness. If only her mother were here! Talk to her, Thirza; you can say things that I can't!"

Thirza looked after the retreating figure. In spite of his cloth, perhaps a little because of it, he seemed to her like a child who had come to show her his sore finger. And, having finished the arrangement of her flowers, she went out to find her niece. She had not far to go; for Noel was standing in the hall, quite evidently lying in wait. They went out together to the avenue.

The girl began at once:

"It isn't any use talking to me, Auntie; Cyril is going to get a license."

"Oh! So you've made up your minds?"

"Quite."

"Do you think that's fair by me, Nollie? Should I have asked him here if I'd thought this was going to happen?"

Noel only smiled.

"Have you the least idea what marriage means?"

Noel nodded.

"Really?"

"Of course. Gratian is married. Besides, at school——"

"Your father is dead against it. This is a sad thing for him. He's a perfect saint, and you oughtn't to hurt him. Can't you wait, at least, till Cyril's next leave?"

"He might never have one, you see."

The heart of her whose boys were out there too, and might also never have another leave, could not but be responsive to those words. She looked at her niece, and a dim appreciation of this revolt of life menaced by death, of youth threatened with extinction, stirred in her. Noel's teeth were clenched, her lips drawn back, and she was staring in front of her.

"Daddy oughtn't to mind. Old people haven't to fight, and get killed; they oughtn't to mind us taking what we can. They've had their good time."

It was such a just little speech that Thirza answered:

"Yes; perhaps he hasn't quite realised that."

"I want to make sure of Cyril, Auntie; I want everything I can have with him while there's the chance. I don't think it's much to ask, when perhaps I'll never have any more of him again."

Thirza slipped her hand through the girl's arm.

"I understand," she said. "Only, Nollie, suppose, when all this is over, and we breathe and live naturally once more, you found you'd made a mistake?"

Noel shook her head. "I haven't."

"We all think that, my dear; but thousands of mistakes are made by people who no more dream they're making them than you do now; and then it's a very horrible business. It would be especially horrible for you; your father believes heart and soul in marriage being for ever."

"Daddy's a darling; but I don't always believe what he believes, you know. Besides, I'm *not* making a mistake, Auntie! I love Cyril ever so."

Thirza gave her waist a squeeze.

"You mustn't make a mistake. We love you too much, Nollie. I wish we had Gratian here."

"Gratian would back me up," said Noel; "she knows what the war is. And you ought to, Auntie. If Rex or Harry wanted to be married, I'm sure you'd never oppose them. And they're no older than Cyril. You *must* understand what it means to me,

Auntie dear, to feel that we belong to each other properly before —before it all begins for him, and—and there may be no more. Daddy doesn't realise. I know he's awfully good, but—he's forgotten."

"My dear, I think he remembers only too well. He was desperately attached to your mother."

Noel clenched her hands.

"Was he? Well, so am I to Cyril, and he to me. We wouldn't be unreasonable if it wasn't—wasn't necessary. Talk to Cyril, Auntie; then you'll understand. There he is; only, don't keep him long, because I want him. Oh! Auntie, I want him *so badly!*"

She turned, and slipped back into the house; and Thirza, conscious of having been decoyed to this young man, who stood there with his arms folded, like Napoleon before a battle, smiled and said:

"Well, Cyril, so you've betrayed me!"

Even in speaking she was conscious of the really momentous change in this sunburnt, blue-eyed, lazily impudent youth since the day he arrived, three weeks ago, in their little wagonette. He took her arm, just as Noel had, and made her sit down beside him on the rustic bench, where he had evidently been told to wait.

"You see, Mrs. Pierson," he said, "it's not as if Noel were an ordinary girl in an ordinary time, is it? Noel is the sort of girl one would knock one's brains out for; and to send me out there knowing that I could have been married to her and wasn't, will take all the heart out of me. Of course I mean to come back, but chaps do get knocked over, and I think it's cruel that we can't take what we can while we can. Besides, I've got money; and that would be hers anyway. So, do be a darling, won't you?" He put his arm round her waist, just as if he had been her son, and her heart, which wanted her own boys so badly, felt warmed within her.

"You see, I don't know Mr. Pierson, but he seems awfully gentle and jolly, and if he could see into me he wouldn't mind, I know. We don't mind risking our lives and all that, but we do think we ought to have the run of them while we're alive. I'll give him my dying oath or anything, that I could never change towards Noel, and she'll do the same. Oh! Mrs. Pierson, do be a jolly brick, and put in a word for me, quick! We've got so few days!"

"But, my dear boy," said Thirza feebly, "do you think it's fair to such a child as Noel?"

"Yes, I do. You don't understand; she's simply had to grow up. She *is* grown-up—all in this week; she's quite as old as I am, really—and I'm twenty-two. And you know it's going to be—it's got to be—a young world, from now on; people will begin doing things much earlier. What's the use of pretending it's like what it was, and being cautious, and all that? If I'm going to be killed, I think we've got a right to be married first; and if I'm not, then what does it matter?"

"You've known each other twenty-one days, Cyril."

"No; twenty-one years! very day's a year when—— Oh! Mrs. Pierson, this isn't like you, is it? You never go to meet trouble, do you?"

At that shrewd remark, Thirza put her hand on the hand which still clasped her waist, and pressed it closer.

"Well, my dear," she said softly, "we must see what can be done."

Cyril Morland kissed her cheek. "I will bless you for ever," he said. "I haven't got any people, you know, except my two sisters."

And something like tears stared up on Thirza's eyelashes. They seemed to her like the babes in the wood—those two!

IV

1 §

In the dining-room of her father's house in that old London Square between East and West, Gratian Laird, in the outdoor garb of a nurse, was writing a telegram: "Reverend Edward Pierson, Kestrel, Tintern, Monmouthshire. George terribly ill. Please come if you can. Gratian." Giving it to a maid, she took off her long coat and sat down for a moment. She had been travelling all night, after a full day's work, and had only just arrived, to find her husband between life and death. She was very different from Noel; not quite so tall, but of a stronger build; with dark chestnut-coloured hair, clear hazel eyes, and a broad brow. The expression of her face was earnest, with a sort of constant spiritual enquiry, and a singularly truthful look. She was just twenty; and of the year that she had been married, had only spent six weeks with her husband; they had not even a house of their own as yet. After resting five minutes, she passed her hand vigorously over her face, threw back her head, and walked up stairs to the room where he lay. He was not conscious, and there was nothing to be done but sit and watch him. 'If he dies,' she thought, 'I shall hate God for His cruelty. I have had six weeks with George; some people have sixty years.' She fixed her eyes on his face, short and broad, with bumps of "observation" on the brows. He had been sunburnt. The dark lashes of his closed eyes lay on deathly yellow cheeks; his thick hair grew rather low on his broad forehead. The lips were just open and showed strong white teeth. He had a little clipped moustache, and hair had grown on his clean-cut jaw. His pyjama jacket had fallen open. Gratian drew it close. It was curiously still, for a London day, though the window was wide open. Anything to break this heavy stupor, which was not only George's but her own, and the very world's! The cruelty of it—when she might be going to lose him for ever, in a few hours or days! She thought of their last parting. It had not been very loving, had come too soon after one of those arguments they were inclined to have, in which they could not as yet disagree with suavity. George had said there was no

future life for the individual; she had maintained there was. They had grown hot and impatient. Even in the cab on the way to his train they had pursued the wretched discussion, and the last kiss had been from lips on lips yet warm from disagreement. Ever since, as if in compunction, she had been wavering towards his point of view; and now, when he was perhaps to solve the problem—find out for certain—she had come to feel that if he died, she would never see him after. It was cruel that such a blight should have come on her belief at this, of all moments.

She laid her hand on his. It was warm, felt strong, although so motionless and helpless. George was so vigorous, so alive, and strong-willed; it seemed impossible that life might be going to play him false. She recalled the unflinching look of his steel-bright eyes, his deep, queerly vibrating voice, which had no trace of self-consciousness or pretence. She slipped her hand on to his heart, and began very slowly, gently rubbing it. He, as doctor, and she, as nurse, had both seen so much of death these last two years! Yet it seemed suddenly as if she had never seen death, and that the young faces she had seen, empty and white, in the hospital wards, had just been a show. Death would appear to her for the first time, if this face which she loved were to be drained for ever of light and colour and movement and meaning.

A humblebee from the Square Garden boomed in and buzzed idly round the room. She caught her breath in a little sob. . . .

2 §

Pierson received that telegram at midday, returning from a lonely walk after his talk with Thirza. Coming from Gratian—so self-reliant—it meant the worst. He prepared at once to catch the next train. Noel was out, no one knew where: so with a sick feeling he wrote:

"Dearest Child,

"I am going up to Gratian; poor George is desperately ill. If it goes badly you should be with your sister. I will wire to-morrow morning early. I leave you in your aunt's hands, my dear. Be reasonable and patient. God bless you.

"Your devoted

"Daddy."

He was alone in his third-class compartment, and, leaning forward, watched the ruined Abbey across the river till it was out of sight. Those old monks had lived in an age surely not so sad as this. They must have had peaceful lives, remote down here, in days when the Church was great and lovely, and men laid down their lives for their belief in her, and built everlasting fanes to the glory of God! What a change to this age of rush and hurry, of science, trade, material profit, and this terrible war! He tried to read his paper, but it was full of horrors and hate. 'When will it end?' he thought. And the train with its rhythmic jolting seemed grinding out the answer: "Never—never!"

At Chepstow a soldier got in, followed by a woman with a very flushed face and curious, swimmy eyes; her hair was in disorder, and her lip bleeding, as if she had bitten it through. The soldier, too, looked strained and desperate. They sat down, far apart, on the seat opposite. Pierson, feeling that he was in their way, tried to hide himself behind his paper; when he looked again, the soldier had taken off his tunic and cap and was leaning out of the window. The woman, on the seat's edge, sniffing and wiping her face, met his glance with resentful eyes, then, getting up, she pulled the man's sleeve.

"Sit dahn; don't 'ang out o' there."

The soldier flung himself back on the seat and looked at Pierson.

"The wife an' me's 'ad a bit of a row," he said companionably. "Gits on me nerves; I'm not used to it. She was in a raid, and 'er nerves are all gone funny; ain't they, old girl? Makes me feel me 'ead. I've been wounded there, you know; can't stand much now. I might do somethin' if she was to go on like this for long."

Pierson looked at the woman, but her eyes still met his resentfully. The soldier held out a packet of cigarettes. "Take one," he said. Pierson took one and, feeling that the soldier wanted him to speak, murmured: "We all have these troubles with those we're fond of; the fonder we are of people, the more we feel them, don't we? I had one with my daughter last night."

"Ah!" said the soldier; "that's right. The wife and me'll make it up. 'Ere, come orf it, old girl."

From behind his paper he soon became conscious of the sounds of reconciliation—reproaches because someone had been offered a drink, kisses mixed with mild slappings, and abuse. When

they got out at Bristol the soldier shook his hand warmly, but the woman still gave him her resentful stare, and he thought dreamily: 'The war! How it affects everyone!' His carriage was invaded by a swarm of soldiers, and the rest of the journey was passed in making himself small. When at last he reached home, Gratian met him in the hall.

"Just the same. The doctor says we shall know in a few hours now. How sweet of you to come! You must be tired, in this heat. It was dreadful to spoil your holiday."

"My dear! As if—— May I go up and see him."

George Laird was still lying in that stupor. And Pierson stood gazing down at him compassionately. Like most parsons, he had a wide acquaintance with the sick and dying; and one remorseless fellowship with death. Death! The commonest thing in the world, now—commoner than life! This young doctor must have seen many die in these last two years, saved many from death; and there he lay, not able to lift a finger to save himself. Pierson looked at his daughter; what a strong, promising young couple they were! And putting his arm round her, he led her away to the sofa, whence they could see the sick man.

"If he dies, Dad——" she whispered.

"He will have died for the Country, my love, as much as ever our soldiers do."

"I know; but that's no comfort. I've been watching here all day; I've been thinking; men will be just as brutal afterwards—more brutal. The world will go on the same."

"We must hope not. Shall we pray, Gracie?"

Gratian shook her head.

"If I could believe that the world—if I could believe anything! I've lost the power, Dad; I don't even believe in a future life. If George dies, we shall never meet again."

Pierson stared at her without a word.

Gratian went on: "The last time we talked, I was angry with George because he laughed at my belief; now that I really want belief, I feel that he was right."

Pierson said tremulously:

"No, no, my dear; it's only that you're overwrought. God in His mercy will give you back belief."

"There is no God, Dad."

"My darling child, what are you saying?"

"No God who can *help* us; I feel it. If there were any God

who could take part in our lives, alter anything without our will, knew or cared what we did—He wouldn't let the world go on as it does."

"But, my dear, His purposes are inscrutable. We dare not say He should not do this or that, or try to fathom to what ends He is working."

"Then He's no good to us. It's the same as if He didn't exist. Why should I pray for George's life to One whose ends are just His own? I *know* George oughtn't to die. If there's a God who can help, it will be a wicked shame if George dies; if there's a God who can help, it's a wicked shame when babies die, and all these millions of poor boys. I would rather think there's no God than a helpless or a wicked God——"

Her father had suddenly thrown up his hands to his ears. She moved closer, and put her arm round him.

"Dad dear, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to hurt you."

Pierson pressed her face down to his shoulder; and said in a dull voice:

"What do you think would have happened to me, Gracie, if I had lost belief when your mother died? I have never lost belief. Pray God I never shall!"

Gratian murmured:

"George would not wish me to pretend I believe—he would want me to be honest. If I'm not honest, I shan't deserve that he should live. I don't believe, and I can't pray."

"My darling, you're overtired."

"No, Dad." She raised her head from his shoulder and, clasping her hands round her knees, looked straight before her. "We can only help ourselves; and I can only bear it if I rebel."

Pierson sat with trembling lips, feeling that nothing he could say would touch her just then. The sick man's face was hardly visible now in the twilight, and Gratian went over to his bed. She stood looking down at him a long time.

"Go and rest, Dad; the doctor's coming again at eleven. I'll call you if I want anything. I shall lie down a little, beside him."

Pierson kissed her, and went out. To lie there beside him would be the greatest comfort she could get. He went to the bare narrow little room he had occupied ever since his wife died; and, taking off his boots, walked up and down, with a feeling of almost crushing loneliness. Both his daughters in such trouble, and he of no use to them! It was as if Life were pushing him

utterly aside! He felt confused, helpless, bewildered. Surely if Gratian loved George, she had not left God's side, whatever she might say. Then, conscious of the profound heresy of this thought, he stood still at the open window.

Earthly love—heavenly love; was there any analogy between them?

From the Square Gardens the indifferent whisper of the leaves answered; and a newsvendor at the far end, bawling his nightly tale of murder.

3 §

George Laird passed the crisis of his illness that night, and in the morning was pronounced out of danger. He had a splendid constitution, and—Scotsman on his father's side—a fighting character. He came back to life very weak, but avid of recovery; and his first words were: "I've been hanging over the edge, Gracie!"

A very high cliff, and his body half over, balancing; one inch, the merest fraction of an inch more, and over he would have gone. Deuced rum sensation! But not so horrible as it would have been in real life. With the slip of that last inch he felt he would have passed at once into oblivion, without the long horror of a fall. So this was what it was for all the poor fellows he had seen slip in the past two years! Mercifully, at the end, one was not alive enough to be conscious of what one was leaving, not alive enough even to care. If he had been able to take in the presence of his young wife, able to realise that he was looking at her face, touching her for the last time—it would have been hell; if he had been up to realising sunlight, moonlight, the sound of the world's life outside, the softness of the bed he lay on—it would have meant the most poignant anguish of defraudment. Life was a rare good thing, and to be squashed out of it with your powers at full, a wretched mistake in Nature's arrangements, a wretched villainy on the part of Man—for his own death, like all those other millions of premature deaths, would have been due to the idiocy and brutality of men! He could smile now, with Gratian looking down at him, but the experience had heaped fuel on a fire which had always smouldered in his doctor's soul against that half-emancipated breed of apes, the human race. Well, now he would get a few days off from his death-carnival! And he lay, feasting his returning

senses on his wife. She made a pretty nurse, and his practised eye judged her a good one—firm and quiet.

George Laird was thirty. At the opening of the war he was in an East-End practice, and had volunteered at once for service with the Army. For the first nine months he had been right up in the thick of it. A poisoned arm, rather than the authorities, had sent him home. During that leave he married Gratian. He had known the Piersons some time; and, made conscious of the instability of life, had resolved to marry her at the first chance he got. For his father-in-law he had respect and liking, ever mixed with what was not quite contempt and not quite pity. The blend of authority with humility, cleric with dreamer, monk with artist, mystic with man of action, in Pierson, excited in him an interested, but often irritated, wonder. He saw things so differently himself, and had little of the humorous curiosity which enjoys what is strange simply because it is strange. They could never talk together without soon reaching a point when he wanted to say: "If we're not to trust our reason and our senses for what they're worth, sir—will you kindly tell me what we are to trust? How can we exert them to the utmost in some matters, and in others suddenly turn our backs on them?" Once, in one of their discussions, which often bordered on acrimony, he had expounded himself at length.

"I grant," he had said, "that there's a great ultimate Mystery, that we shall never know anything for certain about the origin of life and the principle of the Universe; but why should we suddenly shut up our enquiring apparatus and deny all the evidence of our reason—say, about the story of Christ, or the question of a future life, or our moral code? If you want me to enter a temple of little mysteries, leaving my reason and senses behind—as a Mohammedan leaves his shoes—it won't do to say to me simply: 'There it is! Enter!' You must show me the door; and you can't! And I'll tell you why, sir. Because in your brain there's a little twist which is not in mine, or the lack of a little twist which is in mine. Nothing more than that divides us into the two main species of mankind, one of whom worships, and one of whom doesn't. Oh, yes! I know, you won't admit that, because it makes your religions natural instead of what you call supernatural. But I assure you there's nothing more to it. Your eyes look up or they look down—they never look straight before them. Well, mine do just the opposite."

That day Pierson had been feeling very tired, and though to

meet this attack was vital, he had been unable to meet it. His brain had stammered. He had turned a little away, leaning his cheek on his hand, as if to cover that momentary break in his defences. Some days later he had said:

"I am able now to answer your questions, George. I think I can make you understand."

Laird had answered: "All right, sir; go ahead."

"You begin by assuming that the human reason is the final test of all things. What right have you to assume that? Suppose you were an ant. You would take your ant's reason as the final test, wouldn't you? Would that be the truth?" And a smile had fixed itself on his lips above his little grave beard.

George Laird also had smiled.

"That seems a good point, sir," he said, "until you recognise that I don't take the human reason as final test in any absolute sense. I only say *it's the highest test we can apply;* and that, behind that test all is quite dark and unknowable."

"Revelation, then, means nothing to you?"

"Nothing, sir."

"I don't think we can usefully go on, George."

"I don't think we can, sir. In talking with you, I always feel like fighting a man with one hand tied behind his back."

"And I, perhaps, feel that I am arguing with one who was blind from birth."

For all that, they had often argued since; but never without those peculiar smiles coming on their faces. Still, they respected each other, and Pierson had not opposed his daughter's marriage to this heretic, whom he knew to be an honest and trustworthy man. It had taken place before Laird's arm was well, and the two had snatched a month's honeymoon before he went back to France, and she to her hospital in Manchester. Since then, just one February fortnight by the sea had been all their time together. . . .

In the afternoon he had asked for beef tea, and, having drunk a cup, said:

"I've got something to tell your father."

But warned by the pallor of his smiling lips, Gratian answered:

"Tell me first, George."

"Our last talk, Gracie; well—there's nothing on the other side. I looked over; it's as black as your hat."

Gratian shivered.

"I know. While you were lying here last night, I told father."

He squeezed her hand, and said: "I also want to tell him."

"Dad will say the motive for life is gone."

"I say it leaps out all the more, Gracie. What a mess we make of it—we angel-apes! When shall we be *men,* I wonder? You and I, Gracie, will fight for a decent life for everybody. No hands-upping about that! Bend down! It's good to touch you again; everything's good. I'm going to have a sleep. . . ."

4 §

After the relief of the doctor's report in the early morning Pierson had gone through a hard struggle. What should he wire to Noel? He longed to get her back home, away from temptation to the burning indiscretion of this marriage. But ought he to suppress reference to George's progress? Would that be honest? At last he sent this telegram: "George out of danger but very weak. Come up."

By the afternoon post, however, he received a letter from Thirza:

"I have had two long talks with Noel and Cyril. It is impossible to budge them. And I really think, dear Edward, that it will be a mistake to oppose it rigidly. He may not go out as soon as we think. How would it be to consent to their having banns published?—that would mean another three weeks anyway, and in absence from each other they might be influenced to put if off. I'm afraid this is the only chance, for if you simply forbid it, I feel they will run off and get married somewhere at a registrar's."

Pierson took this letter out with him into the Square Garden, for painful cogitation. No man can hold a position of spiritual authority for long years without developing the habit of judgment. He judged Noel's conduct to be headlong and undisciplined, and the vein of stubbornness in his character fortified the father and the priest within him. Thirza disappointed him; she did not seem to see the irretrievable gravity of this hasty marriage. She seemed to look on it as something much lighter than it was, to consider that it might be left to Chance, and that if Chance turned out unfavourable, there would still be a way out. To him there would be no way out. He looked up at the sky, as if for inspiration. It was such a beautiful day, and so

bitter to hurt his child, even for her good! What would her mother have advised? Surely Agnes had felt at least as deeply as himself the utter solemnity of marriage! And, sitting there in the sunlight, he painfully hardened his heart. He must do what he thought right, no matter what the consequences. So he went in and wrote that he could not agree, and wished Noel to come back home at once.

V

1 §

But on the same afternoon, just about that hour, Noel was sitting on the river-bank with her arms folded tight across her chest, and by her side Cyril Morland, with despair in his face, was twisting a telegram: "Rejoin to-night. Regiment leaves to-morrow."

What consolation that a million such telegrams had been read and sorrowed over these last two years! What comfort that the sun was daily blotted dim for hundreds of bright eyes; the joy of life poured out and sopped up by the sands of desolation!

"How long have we got, Cyril?"

"I've engaged a car from the Inn, so I needn't leave till midnight. I've packed already, to have more time."

"Let's have it to ourselves, then. Let's go off somewhere. I've got some chocolate."

Morland answered miserably:

"I can send the car up here for my things, and have it pick me up at the Inn, if you'll say good-bye to them for me, afterwards. We'll walk down the line, then we shan't meet anyone."

And in the bright sunlight they walked hand in hand on each side of a shining rail. About six they reached the Abbey.

"Let's get a boat," said Noel. "We can come back here when it's moonlight. I know a way of getting in, after the gate's shut."

They hired a boat, rowed over to the far bank, and sat on the stern seat, side by side under the trees where the water was stained deep green by the high woods. If they talked, it was but a word of love now and then, or to draw each other's attention to a fish, a bird, a dragon-fly. What use making plans —for lovers the chief theme? Longing paralysed their brains. They could do nothing but press close to each other, their hands enlaced, their lips meeting now and then. On Noel's face was a strange fixed stillness, as if she were waiting—expecting! They ate their chocolates. The sun set, dew began to fall; the river changed, and grew whiter; the sky paled to the colour of an amethyst; shadows lengthened, dissolved slowly. It was

past nine already; a water-rat came out, a white owl flew over the river, towards the Abbey. The moon had come up, but shed no light as yet. They saw no beauty in all this—too young, too passionate, too unhappy.

Noel said: "When she's over those trees, Cyril, let's go. It'll be half dark."

They waited, watching the moon, which crept with infinite slowness up and up, brightening ever so little every minute.

"Now!" said Noel. And Morland rowed across.

They left the boat, and she led the way past an empty cottage, to a shed with a roof sloping up to the Abbey's low outer wall.

"We can get over here," she whispered.

They clambered up, and over, to a piece of grassy courtyard, and passed on to an inner court, under the black shadow of the high walls.

"What's the time?" said Noel.

"Half-past ten."

"Already! Let's sit here in the dark, and watch for the moon."

They sat down close together. Noel's face still had on it that strange look of waiting; and Morland sat obedient, with his hand on her heart, and his own heart beating almost to suffocation. They sat, still as mice, and the moon crept up. It laid a first vague greyness on the high wall, which spread slowly down, and brightened till the lichen and the grasses up there were visible; then crept on, silvering the dark above their heads. Noel pulled his sleeve, and whispered: "See!" There came the white owl, soft as a snowflake, drifting across in that unearthly light, as if flying to the moon. And just then the top of the moon itself looked over the wall, a shaving of silvery gold. It grew, became a bright spread fan, then balanced there, full and round, the colour of pale honey.

"Ours!" Noel whispered.

2 §

From the side of the road Noel listened till the sound of the car was lost in the folds of the valley. She did not cry, but passed her hands over her face, and began to walk home, keeping to the shadow of the trees. How many years had been added to her age in those six hours since the telegram came! Several times in that mile and a half she stepped into a patch of brighter

moonlight, to take out and kiss a little photograph, then slip it back next her heart, heedless that so warm a place must destroy any effigy. She felt not the faintest compunction for the recklessness of her love—it was her only comfort against the crushing loneliness of the night. It kept her up, made her walk on with a sort of pride, as if she had got the best of Fate. He was hers for ever now, in spite of anything that could be done. She did not even think what she would say when she got in. She came to the avenue, and passed up it still in a sort of dream. Her uncle was standing before the porch; she could hear his mutterings. She moved out of the shadow of the trees, went straight up to him, and, looking in his perturbed face, said calmly:

"Cyril asked me to say good-bye to you all, Uncle. Good night!"

"But, I say, Nollie—look here—you——!"

She had passed on. She went up to her room. There, by the door, her aunt was standing, and would have kissed her. She drew back:

"No, Auntie. Not to-night!" And, slipping by, she locked her door.

Bob and Thirza Pierson, meeting in their own room, looked at each other askance. Relief at their niece's safe return was confused by other emotions. Bob Pierson expressed his first:

"Phew! I was beginning to think we should have to drag the river. What girls are coming to!"

"It's the war, Bob."

"I didn't like her face, old girl. I don't know what it was, but I didn't like her face."

Neither did Thirza, but she would not admit it, and encourage Bob to take it to heart. He took things so hardly, and with such a noise!

She only said: "Poor young things! I suppose it will be a relief to Edward!"

"I love Nolly!" said Bob Pierson suddenly. "She's an affectionate creature. D——n it, I'm sorry about this. It's not so bad for young Morland; he's got the excitement—though I shouldn't like to be leaving Nollie, if I were young again. Thank God, neither of our boys is engaged. By George! when I think of them out there, and myself here, I feel as if the top of my head would come off. And those politician chaps spouting away in every country—how they can have the cheek!"

Thirza looked at him anxiously.

"And no dinner!" he said suddenly. "What d'you think they've been doing with themselves?"

"Holding each other's hands, poor dears! D'you know what time it is, Bob? Nearly one o'clock."

"Well, all I can say is, I've had a wretched evening. Get to bed, old girl. You'll be fit for nothing."

He was soon asleep, but Thirza lay awake, not exactly worrying, for that was not her nature, but seeing Noel's face, pale, languid, passionate, possessed by memory.

VI

1 §

Noel reached her father's house next day late in the afternoon. There was a letter in the hall for her. She tore it open, and read:

"My darling Love,

"I got back all right, and am posting this at once to tell you we shall pass through London, and go from Charing Cross, I expect about nine o'clock to-night. I shall look out for you, there, in case you are up in time. Every minute I think of you, and of last night. Oh! Noel!

"Your devoted lover,

"C."

She looked at the wrist-watch, which, like every other little patriot, she possessed. Past seven! If she waited, Gratian or her father would seize on her.

"Take my things up, Dinah. I've got a headache from travelling; I'm going to walk it off. Perhaps I shan't be in till past nine or so. Give my love to them all."

"Oh, Miss Noel, you can't——"

But Noel was gone. She walked towards Charing Cross; and, to kill time, went into a restaurant and had that simple repast, coffee and a bun, which those in love would always take if Society did not forcibly feed them on other things. Food was ridiculous to her. She sat there in the midst of a perfect hive of creatures eating hideously. The place was shaped like a modern prison, having tiers of gallery round an open space, and in the air was the smell of viands and the clatter of plates and the music of a band. Men in khaki everywhere, and Noel glanced from form to form to see if by chance one might be that which represented, for her, Life and the British Army. At half-past eight she went out and made her way through the crowd, still mechanically searching "khaki" for what she wanted; and it was perhaps fortunate that there was about her face and walk something which touched people. At the station she went up

to an old porter, and, putting a shilling into his astonished hand, asked him to find out for her whence Morland's regiment would start. He came back presently, and said:

"Come with me, miss."

Noel went. He was rather lame, had grey whiskers, and a ghostly thin resemblance to her uncle Bob, which perhaps had been the reason why she had chosen him.

"Brother goin' out, miss?"

Noel nodded.

"Ah! It's a crool war. I shan't be sorry when it's over. Goin' out and comin' in, we see some sad sights 'ere. Wonderful spirit they've got, too. I never look at the clock now but what I think: 'There you go, slow-coach! I'd like to set you on to the day the boys come back!' When I puts a bag in: 'Another for 'ell,' I thinks. And so it is, miss, from all I can 'ear. I've got a son out there meself. It's 'ere they'll come along. You stand quiet and keep a lookout, and you'll get a few minutes with him when he's done with 'is men. I wouldn't move, if I were you; he'll come to you, all right—can't miss you, there." And, looking at her face, he thought: 'Astonishin' what a lot o' brothers go. Wot ho! Poor little missy! A little lady, too. Wonderful collected she is. It's 'ard!' And trying to find something consoling to say, he mumbled out: "You couldn't be in a better place for seein' 'im off. Good night, miss; anything else I can do for you?"

"No, thank you; you're very kind."

He looked back once or twice at her blue-clad figure standing very still. He had left her against a little oasis of piled-up empty milk-cans, far down the platform where a few civilians in similar case were scattered. The trainway was empty as yet. In the grey immensity of the station and the turmoil of its noise, she felt neither lonely nor conscious of others waiting; too absorbed in the one thought of seeing him and touching him again. The empty train began backing in, stopped, and telescoped with a series of little clattering bangs, backed on again, and subsided to rest. Noel turned her eyes towards the station arch ways. Already she felt tremulous, as though the regiment were sending before it the vibration of its march.

She had not as yet seen a troop-train start, and vague images of brave array, of a flag fluttering, and the stir of drums, beset her. Suddenly she saw a brown swirling mass down there at the very edge, out of which a thin brown trickle emerged towards

her; no sound of music, no waved flag. She had a longing to rush down to the barrier, but remembering the words of the porter, stayed where she was, with her hands tightly squeezed together. The trickle became a stream, a flood, the head of which began to reach her. With a turbulence of voices, sunburnt men, burdened up to the nose, passed, with rifles jutting at all angles; she strained her eyes, staring into that stream as one might into a walking wood, to isolate a single tree. Her head reeled with the strain of it, and the effort to catch his voice among the hubbub of all those cheery, common, happy-go-lucky sounds. Some who saw her clucked their tongues, some went by silent, others seemed to scan her as though she might be what they were looking for. And ever the stream and the hubbub melted into the train, and yet came pouring on. And still she waited motionless, with an awful fear. How could he ever find her, or she him? Then she saw that others of those waiting had found their men. And the longing to rush up and down the platform almost overcame her; but still she waited. And suddenly she saw him with two other officer boys, close to the carriages, coming slowly down towards her. She stood with her eyes fixed on his face; they passed, and she nearly cried out. Then he turned, broke away from the other two, and came straight to her. He had seen her before she had seen him. He was very flushed, had a little fixed frown between his blue eyes and a set jaw. They stood looking at each other, their hands hard gripped; all the emotion of last night welling up within them, so that to speak would have been to break down. The milk-cans formed a kind of shelter, and they stood so close together that none could see their faces. Noel was the first to master her power of speech; her words came out, dainty as ever, through trembling lips:

"Write to me as much as ever you can, Cyril. I'm going to be a nurse at once. And the first leave you get, I shall come to you—don't forget."

"Forget! Move a little back, darling; they can't see us here. Kiss me!" She moved back, thrust her face forward so that he need not stoop, and put her lips up to his. Then, feeling that she might swoon and fall over among the cans, she withdrew her mouth, leaving her forehead against his lips. He murmured:

"Was it all right when you got in last night?"

"Yes; I said good-bye for you."

"Oh! Noel—I've been afraid—I oughtn't—I oughtn't——"

"Yes, yes; nothing can take you from me now."

"You *have* got pluck. More than I."

A long whistle sounded. Morland grasped her hands convulsively:

"Good-bye, my little wife! Don't fret. Good-bye! I must go. God bless you, Noel!"

"I love you."

They looked at each other, just another moment, then she took her hands from his and stood back in the shadow of the milk-cans, rigid, following him with her eyes till he was lost in the train.

Every carriage window was full of those brown figures and red-brown faces, hands were waving vaguely, voices calling vaguely, here and there one cheered; someone leaning far out started to sing: "If auld acquaintance——" But Noel stood quite still in the shadow of the milk-cans, her lips drawn in, her hands hard clenched in front of her; and young Morland at his window gazed back at her. . . .

2 §

How she came to be sitting in Trafalgar Square she did not know. Tears had formed a mist between her and all that seething, summer-evening crowd. Her eyes mechanically followed the wandering search-lights, those new milky ways, quartering the heavens and leading nowhere. All was wonderfully beautiful, the sky a deep dark blue, the moonlight whitening the spire of St. Martin's, and everywhere endowing the great blocked-out buildings with dream-life. Even the lions had come to life, and stared out over this moonlit desert of little human figures too small to be worth the stretching out of a paw. She sat there, aching dreadfully, as if the longing of every bereaved heart in all the town had settled in her. She felt it to-night a thousand times worse; for last night she had been drugged on the new sensation of love triumphantly fulfilled. Now she felt as if life had placed her in the corner of a huge silent room, blown out the flame of joy, and locked the door. A little dry sob came from her. The hay-fields and Cyril, with shirt unbuttoned at the neck, pitching hay and gazing at her while she dabbled her fork in the thin leavings. The bright river, and their boat grounded on the shallows, and the swallows flitting

over them. And that long dance, with the feel of his hand between her shoulder-blades! Memories so sweet and sharp that she almost cried out. She saw again their dark grassy courtyard in the Abbey, and the white owl flying over them. The white owl! Flying there again to-night, with no lovers on the grass below! She could only picture Cyril now as a brown atom in that swirling brown flood of men, flowing to a huge brown sea. Those cruel minutes on the platform, when she had searched and searched the walking wood for her one tree, seemed to have burned themselves into her eyes. Cyril was lost, she could not single him out, all blurred among those thousand other shapes. And suddenly she thought: 'And I—I'm lost to him; he's never seen me at home, never seen me in London; he won't be able to imagine me. It's all in the past, only the past—for both of us. Is there anybody so unhappy?' And the town's voices—wheels, and passing feet, whistles, talk, laughter—seemed to answer callously: 'Not one.' She looked at her wrist-watch; like his, it had luminous hands. 'Half-past ten' was greenishly imprinted there. She got up in dismay. They would think she was lost, or run over, or something silly! She could not find an empty taxi, and began to walk, uncertain of her way at night. At last she stopped a policeman, and said:

"Which is the way towards Bloomsbury, please? I can't find a taxi." The man looked at her, and took time to think it over; then he said:

"They're linin' up for the theatres," and looked at her again. Something seemed to move in his mechanism:

"I'm goin' that way, miss. If you like, you can step along with me." Noel stepped along.

"The streets aren't what they ought to be," the policeman said. "What with the darkness, and the war turning the girls' heads—you'd be surprised the number of them that comes out. It's the soldiers, of course."

Noel felt her cheeks burning.

"I dare say you wouldn't have noticed it," the policeman went on: "but this war's a funny thing. The streets are gayer and more crowded at night than I've ever seen them; it's a fair picnic all the time. What we're goin' to settle down to when peace comes, I don't know. I suppose you find it quiet enough up your way, miss?"

"Yes," said Noel; "quite quiet."

"No soldiers up in Bloomsbury. You got anyone in the Army, miss?"

Noel nodded.

"Ah! It's anxious times for ladies. What with the Zeps, and their brothers and all in France, it's 'arassin'. I've lost a brother meself, and I've got a boy out there in the Garden of Eden; his mother carries on dreadful about him. What we shall think of it when it's all over, I can't tell. These Huns are a wicked tough lot!"

Noel looked at him; a tall man, regular and orderly, with one of those perfectly decent faces so often seen in the London police.

"I'm sorry you've lost someone," she said. "I haven't lost anyone very near, yet."

"Well, let's 'ope you won't, miss. These times make you feel for others, an that's something. I've noticed a great change in folks you'd never think would feel for anyone. And yet I've seen some wicked things too; we do, in the police. Some of these English wives of aliens, and 'armless little German bakers, an' Austrians, and what-not: they get a crool time. It's their misfortune, not their fault, that's what I think; and the way they get served—well, it makes you ashamed o' bein' English sometimes—it does straight. And the women are the worst. I said to my wife only last night, I said: 'They call themselves Christians,' I said, 'but for all the charity that's in 'em they might as well be Huns.' She couldn't see it—not she! 'Well, why do they drop bombs?' she says. 'What!' I said, 'those English wives and bakers drop bombs? Don't be silly,' I said. 'They're as innocent as we.' It's the innocent that gets punished for the guilty. 'But they're all spies,' she says. 'Oh!' I said, 'old lady! Now really! At your time of life!' But there it is; you can't get a woman to see reason. It's readin' the papers. I often think they must be written by women—beggin' your pardon, miss—but reely, the 'ysterics and the 'atred—they're a fair knock-out. D'you find much hatred in your household, miss?"

Noel shook her head. "No; my father's a clergyman, you see."

"Ah!" said the policeman. And in the glance he bestowed on her could be seen an added respect.

"Of course," he went on, "you're bound to have a sense of justice against these Huns; some of their ways of goin' on have

been above the limit. But what I always think is—of course I don't say these things—no use to make yourself unpopular—but to meself I often think: Take 'em man for man, and you'd find 'em much the same as we are, I dare say. It's the vicious way they're brought up, of actin' in the mass, that's made 'em such a crool lot. I see a good bit of crowds in my profession, and I've a very low opinion of them. Crowds are the most blunderin' blighted things that ever was. They're like an angry woman with a bandage over her eyes, an' you can't have anything more dangerous than that. These Germans, it seems, are always in a crowd. They get a state o' mind read out to them by Bill Kaser and all that bloody-minded lot, an' they never stop to think for themselves."

"I suppose they'd be shot if they did," said Noel.

"Well, there is that," said the policeman reflectively. "They've brought discipline to an 'igh pitch, no doubt. An' if you ask me,"—he lowered his voice till it was almost lost in his chin-strap—"we'll be runnin' 'em a good second 'ere, before long. The things we 'ave to protect now are gettin' beyond a joke. There's the City against lights, there's the streets against darkness, there's the aliens, there's the aliens' shops, there's the Belgians, there's the British wives, there's the soldiers against the women, there's the women against the soldiers, there's the Peace Party, there's 'orses against croolty, there's a Cabinet Minister every now an' then; and now we've got these Conchies. And, mind you, they haven't raised our pay; no war wages in the police. So far as I can see, there's only one good result of the war—the burglaries are off. But there again, you wait a bit and see if we don't have a prize crop of 'm, or my name's not 'Arris."

"You must have an awfully exciting life!" said Noel.

The policeman looked down at her sideways, without lowering his face, as only a policeman can, and said indulgently:

"We're used to it, you see; there's no excitement in what you're used to. They find that in the trenches, I'm told. Take our seamen—there's lots of 'em been blown up over and over again, and there they go and sign on again next day. That's where the Germans make their mistake! England in war-time! I think a lot, you know, on my go; you can't 'elp it—the mind will work—an' the more I think, the more I see the fightin' spirit in the people. We don't make a fuss about it like Bill Kaser. But you watch a little shopman, one o' those fellows

who's had his house bombed; you watch the way he looks at the mess—sort of disgusted. You watch his face, and you see he's got his teeth into it. You watch one of our Tommies on 'is crutches, with the sweat pourin' off his forehead an' 'is eyes all strainy, stumpin' along—that gives you an idea! I pity these Peace fellows, reely I pity them; they don't know what they're up against. I expect there's times when you wish you was a man, don't you, miss? I'm sure there's times when I feel I'd like to go in the trenches. That's the worst o' my job; you can't be a human bein'—not in the full sense of the word. You mustn't let your passions rise, you mustn't drink, you mustn't talk; it's a narrow walk o' life. Well, here you are, miss; your Square's the next turnin' to the right. Good night and thank you for your conversation."

Noel held out her hand. "Good night!" she said.

The policeman took her hand with a queer, flattered embarrassment. "Good night, miss," he said again. "I see you've got a trouble; and I'm sure I hope it'll turn out for the best."

Noel gave his huge hand a squeeze; her eyes had filled with tears, and she turned quickly up towards the Square, where a dark figure was coming towards her, in whom she recognised her father. His face was worn and harassed; he walked irresolutely, like a man who has lost something.

"Nollie!" he said. "Thank God!" In his voice was an infinite relief. "My child, where have you been?"

"It's all right, Daddy. Cyril has just gone to the front. I've been seeing him off from Charing Cross."

Pierson slipped his arm round her. They entered the house without speaking. . . .

3 §

By the rail of his transport, as far—about two feet—as he could get from anyone, Cyril Morland stood watching Calais, a dream city, brighten out of the heat and grow solid. He could hear the guns already, the voice of his new life—talking in the distance. It came with its strange excitement into a being held by soft and marvellous memories, by one long vision of Noel and the moonlit grass, under the dark Abbey wall. This moment of passage from wonder to wonder was quite too much for a boy unused to introspection, and he stood staring stupidly at Calais, while the thunder of his new life came rolling in on that passionate moonlit dream.

VII

After the emotions of those last three days Pierson woke with the feeling a ship must have when it makes landfall. Such reliefs are natural, and as a rule delusive; for events are as much the parents of the future as they were the children of the past. To be at home with both his girls, and resting—for his holiday would not be over for ten days—was like old times. Now George was going on so well Gratian would be herself again; now Cyril Morland was gone Noel would lose that sudden youthful love fever. Perhaps in two or three days if George continued to progress, one might go off with Noel somewhere for one's last week. In the meantime the old house, wherein was gathered so much remembrance of happiness and pain, was just as restful as anywhere else, and the companionship of his girls would be as sweet as on any of their past rambling holidays in Wales or Ireland. And that first morning of perfect idleness—for no one knew he was back in London—pottering, and playing the piano in the homely drawing-room where nothing to speak of was changed since his wife's day, was very pleasant. He had not yet seen the girls, for Noel did not come down to breakfast, and Gratian was with George.

Discovery that there was still a barrier between him and them came but slowly in the next two days. He would not acknowledge it, yet it was there, in their voices, in their movements—rather an absence of something old than the presence of something new. It was as if each had said to him: "We love you, but you are not in our secrets—and you must not be, for you would try to destroy them." They showed no fear of him, but seemed to be pushing him unconsciously away, lest he should restrain or alter what was very dear to them. They were both fond of him, but their natures had set foot on definitely diverging paths. The closer the affection, the more watchful they were against interference by that affection. Noel had a look on her face, half dazed, half proud, which touched, yet vexed him. What had he done to forfeit her confidence—surely she must see how natural and right his opposition had been! He made one great effort to show the real sympathy he felt for her. But she only said: "I can't talk of Cyril,

Daddy; I simply can't!" And he, who easily shrank into his shell, could not but acquiesce in her reserve.

With Gratian it was different. He knew that an encounter was before him; a struggle between him and her husband—for characteristically he set the change in her, the defection of her faith, down to George, not to spontaneous thought and feeling in herself. He dreaded and yet looked forward to this encounter. It came on the third day, when Laird was up, lying on that very sofa where Pierson had sat listening to Gratian's confession of disbelief. Except for putting in his head to say good morning, he had not yet seen his son-in-law. The young doctor could not look fragile, the build of his face, with that jaw and those heavy cheekbones was too much against it, but there was about him enough of the look of having come through a hard fight to give Pierson's heart a squeeze.

"Well, George," he said, "you gave us a dreadful fright! I thank God's mercy." With that half-mechanical phrase he had flung an unconscious challenge. Laird looked up whimsically.

"So you really think God merciful, sir?"

"Don't let us argue, George; you're not strong enough."

"Oh! I'm pining for something to bite on."

Pierson looked at Gratian, and said softly:

"God's mercy is infinite, and you know it is."

Laird also looked at Gratian, before he answered:

"God's mercy is surely the amount of mercy man has succeeded in arriving at. How much that is, this war tells you, sir."

Pierson flushed. "I don't follow you," he said painfully. "How can you say such things, when you yourself are only just—— No; I refuse to argue, George; I refuse."

Laird stretched out his hand to his wife, who came to him, and stood clasping it with her own.

"Well, *I'm* going to argue," he said; "I'm simply bursting with it. I challenge you, sir, to show me where there's any sign of altruistic pity, except in man. Mother love doesn't count—mother and child are too much one."

The curious smile had come already, on both their faces.

"My dear George, is not man the highest work of God, and mercy the highest quality in man?"

"Not a bit. If geological time be taken as twenty-four hours, man's existence on earth so far equals just two seconds of it; after a few more seconds, when man has been frozen off the

earth, geological time will stretch for as long again, before the earth bumps into something, and becomes nebula once more. God's hands haven't been particularly full, sir, have they—two seconds out of twenty-four hours—if man is His pet concern? And as to mercy being the highest quality in man, that's only a modern fashion of talking. Man's highest quality is the sense of proportion, for that's what keeps him alive; and mercy, logically pursued, would kill him off. It's a sort of a luxury or by-product."

"George! You can have no music in your soul! Science is such a little thing, if you could only see."

"Show me a bigger, sir."

"Faith."

"In what?"

"In what has been revealed to us."

"Ah! There it is again! By whom—how?"

"By God Himself—through our Lord."

A faint flush rose in Laird's yellow face, and his eyes brightened.

"Christ," he said, "if He existed, which some people, as you know, doubt, was a very beautiful character; there have been others. But to ask us to believe in His supernaturalness or divinity at this time of day is to ask us to walk through the world blindfold. And that's what you do, don't you?"

Again Pierson looked at his daughter's face. She was standing quite still, with her eyes fixed on her husband. Somehow he was aware that all these words of the sick man's were for her benefit. Anger, and a sort of despair rose within him, and he said painfully:

"I cannot explain. There are things that I can't make clear, because you are wilfully blind to all that I believe in. For what do you imagine we are fighting this great war, if it is not to re-establish the belief in love as the guiding principle of life?"

Laird shook his head. "We are fighting to redress a balance, which was in danger of being lost."

"The balance of power?"

"Heavens!—no! The balance of philosophy."

Pierson smiled. "That sounds very clever, George; but again, I don't follow you."

"The balance between the sayings: 'Might is Right,' and 'Right is Might.' They're both half-truths, but the first was beating the other out of the field. All the rest of it is cant, you

know. And by the way, sir, your Church is solid for punishment of the evil-doer. Where's mercy there? Either its God is not merciful, or else it doesn't believe in its God."

"Just punishment does not preclude mercy, George."

"It does in Nature."

"Ah! Nature, George—always Nature. God transcends Nature."

"Then why does He give it a free rein? A man too fond of drink, or women—how much mercy does he get from Nature? His overindulgence brings its exact equivalent of penalty; let him pray to God as much as he likes—unless he alters his ways he gets no mercy. If he *does* alter his ways, he gets no mercy either; he just gets Nature's due reward. We English who have neglected brain and education—how much mercy are we getting in this war? Mercy's a man-made ornament, disease, or luxury—call it what you will. Except that, I've nothing to say against it. On the contrary, I am all for it."

Once more Pierson looked at his daughter. Something in her face hurt him—the silent intensity with which she was hanging on her husband's words, the eager search of her eyes. And he turned to the door, saying:

"This is bad for you, George."

He saw Gratian put her hand on her husband's forehead and thought jealously: 'How can I save my poor girl from this infidelity? Are my twenty years of care to go for nothing, against this modern spirit?'

Down in his study, the words went through his mind: "Holy, holy, holy, Merciful and Mighty!" And going to the little piano in the corner, he opened it, and began playing the hymn. He played it softly on the shabby keys of this thirty-year old friend, which had been with him since College days; and sang it softly in his worn voice. A sound made him look up. Gratian had come in. She put her hand on his shoulder, and said:

"I know it hurts you, Dad. But we've got to find out for ourselves, haven't we? All the time you and George were talking, I felt that you didn't see that it's I who've changed. It's not what he thinks, but what I've come to think of my own accord. I wish you'd understand that I've got a mind of my own, Dad."

Pierson looked up with amazement.

"Of course you have a mind."

Gratian shook her head. "No, you thought my mind was

yours; and now you think it's George's. But it's *my own*. When you were my age weren't you trying hard to find the truth yourself, and differing from your father?"

Pierson did not answer. He could not remember. It was like stirring a stick amongst a drift of last year's leaves, to awaken but a dry rustling, a vague sense of unsubstantiality. Searched? No doubt he had searched, but the process had brought him nothing. Knowledge was all smoke! Emotional faith alone was truth—reality!

"Ah, Gracie!" he said, "search if you must, but where will you find bottom? The well is too deep for us. You will come back to God, my child, when you're tired out; the only rest is there."

"I don't want to rest. Some people search all their lives, and die searching. Why shouldn't I?"

"You will be most unhappy, my child."

"If I'm unhappy, Dad, it'll be because the world's unhappy. I don't believe it ought to be; I think it only is, because it shuts its eyes."

Pierson got up. "You think I shut my eyes?"

Gratian nodded.

"If I do, it is because there is no other way to happiness."

"Are you happy, Dad?"

"As happy as my nature will let me be. I miss your mother. If I lose you and Noel——"

"Oh, but we won't let you!"

Pierson smiled. "My dear," he said, "I think I have!"

VIII

1 §

Some wag, with a bit of chalk, had written the word "Peace" on three successive doors of a little street opposite Buckingham Palace.

It caught the eye of Jimmy Fort, limping home to his rooms from a very late discussion at his Club, and twisted his lean shaven lips into a sort of smile. He was one of those rolling-stone Englishmen, whose early lives are spent in all parts of the world, and in all kinds of physical conflict—a man like a hickory stick, tall, thin, bolt-upright, knotty, hard as nails, with a curved fighting back to his head and a straight fighting front to his brown face. His was the type which becomes, in a generation or so, typically Colonial or American; but no one could possibly have taken Jimmy Fort for anything but an Englishman. Though he was nearly forty, there was still something of the boy in his face, something frank and curly-headed, gallant and full of steam, and his small steady grey eyes looked out on life with a sort of combative humour. He was still in uniform, though they had given him up as a bad job after keeping him nine months trying to mend a wounded leg which would never be sound again; and he was now in the War Office in connection with horses, about which he knew. He did not like it, having lived too long with all sorts and conditions of men who were neither English nor official, a combination which he found trying. His life indeed, just now, bored him to distraction, and he would ten times rather have been back in France. This was why he found the word "Peace" so exceptionally tantalising.

Reaching his rooms, he threw off his tunic, to whose stiff regularity he still had a great aversion; and, pulling out a pipe, filled it and sat down at his window.

Moonshine could not cool the hot town, and it seemed sleeping badly—the seven million sleepers in their million homes. Sound lingered on, never quite ceased; the stale odours clung in the narrow street below, though a little wind was creeping about to sweeten the air. 'Curse the war!' he thought. 'What wouldn't

I give to be sleeping out, instead of in this damned city!' They who slept in the open, neglecting morality, would certainly have the best of it to-night, for no more dew was falling than fell into Jimmy Fort's heart to cool the fret of that ceaseless thought: 'The war! The cursed war!' In the unending rows of little grey houses, in huge caravanserais, and the mansions of the great, in villas, and high slum tenements; in the government offices, and factories, and railway stations where they worked all night; in the long hospitals where they lay in rows; in the camp prisons of the interned; in barracks, work-houses, palaces—no head, sleeping or waking, would be free of that thought: 'The cursed war!' A spire caught his eye, rising ghostly over the roofs. Ah! churches alone, void of the human soul, would be unconscious! But for the rest, even sleep would not free them! Here a mother would be whispering the name of her boy; there a merchant would snore and dream he was drowning, weighted with gold; and a wife would be turning to stretch out her arms to—no one; and a wounded soldier wake out of a dream-trench with sweat on his brow; and a newsvendor in his garret mutter hoarsely. By thousands the bereaved would be tossing, stifling their moans; by thousands the ruined would be gazing into the dark future; and housewives struggling with sums; and soldiers sleeping like logs—for tomorrow they died; and children dreaming of them; and prostitutes lying in stale wonder at the busyness of their lives; and journalists sleeping the sleep of the just. And over them all, in the moonlight that thought 'The cursed war!' flapped its black wings, like an old crow! "If Christ were real," he mused, "He'd reach that moon down, and go chalking 'Peace' with it on every door of every house, all over Europe. But Christ's not real, and Hindenburg and Harmsworth are!" As real they were as two great bulls he had once seen in South Africa, fighting. He seemed to hear again the stamp and snort and crash of those thick skulls, to see the beasts recoiling and driving at each other, and the little red eyes of them. And pulling a letter out of his pocket, he read it again by the light of the moon:

"15, Camelot Mansions,
"St. John's Wood.

"DEAR MR. FORT,

"I came across your Club address to-night, looking at some old letters. Did you know that I was in London? I left Steen-

bok when my husband died, five years ago. I've had a simply terrific time since. While the German South West campaign was on I was nursing out there, but came back about a year ago to lend a hand here. It would be awfully nice to meet you again, if by any chance you are in England. I'm working in a V. A. D. hospital in these parts, but my evenings are usually free. Do you remember that moonlit night at grape harvest? The nights here aren't scented quite like that. Listerine! Oh! This war!

"With all good remembrances,

"LEILA LYNCH."

A terrific time! If he did not mistake, Leila Lynch had always had a terrific time. And he smiled, seeing again the *stoep* of an old Dutch house at High Constantia, and a woman sitting there under the white flowers of a sweet-scented creeper —a pretty woman, with eyes which could put a spell on you, a woman he would have got entangled with if he had not cut and run for it! Ten years ago, and here she was again, refreshing him out of the past. He sniffed the fragrance of the little letter. How everybody always managed to work into a letter what they were doing in the war! If he answered her he would be sure to say: "Since I got lamed, I've been at the War Office, working on remounts, and a dull job it is!" Leila Lynch! Women didn't get younger, and he suspected her of being older than himself. But he remembered agreeably her white shoulders and that turn of her neck when she looked at you with those big grey eyes of hers. Only a five-day acquaintanceship, but they had crowded much into it—as one did in a strange land. The episode had been a green and dangerous spot, like one of those bright mossy bits of bog when you were snipe-shooting, to set foot on which was to let you down up to the neck, at least. Well, there was none of that danger now, for her husband was dead—poor chap! It would be nice, in these dismal days, when nobody spent any time whatever except in the service of the country, to improve his powers of service by a few hours' recreation in her society. 'What humbugs we are!' he thought: 'To read the newspapers and the speeches you'd believe everybody thought of nothing but how to get killed for the sake of the future. Drunk on verbiage! What heads and mouths we shall all have when we wake up some fine morning with Peace shining in at the window! Ah! If only we could; and enjoy ourselves

again!' And he gazed at the moon. She was dipping already, reeling away into the dawn. Water carts and street sweepers had come out into the glimmer; sparrows twittered in the eaves. The city was raising a strange unknown face to the grey light, shuttered and deserted as Babylon. Jimmy Fort tapped out his pipe, sighed, and got into bed.

2 §

Coming off duty at that very moment, Leila Lynch decided to have her hour's walk before she went home. She was in charge of two wards, and as a rule took the day watches; but some slight upset had given her this extra spell. She was, therefore, at her worst, or perhaps at her best, after eighteen hours in hospital. Her cheeks were pale, and about her eyes were little lines, normally in hiding. There was in this face a puzzling blend of the soft and hard, for the eyes, the rather full lips, and pale cheeks, were naturally soft; but they were hardened by the self-containment which grows on women who have to face life for themselves, and, conscious of beauty, intend to keep it, in spite of age. Her figure was contradictory, also; its soft modelling a little too rigidified by stays. In this desert of the dawn she let her long blue overcoat flap loose, and swung her hat on a finger, so that her light-brown, touched-up hair took the morning breeze with fluffy freedom. Though she could not see herself, she appreciated her appearance, swaying along like that, past lonely trees and houses. A pity there was no one to see her in that round of Regent's Park, which took her the best part of an hour, walking in meditation, enjoying the colour coming back into the world, as if especially for her.

There was character in Leila Lynch, and she had lived an interesting life from a certain point of view. In her girlhood she had fluttered the hearts of many besides Cousin Edward Pierson, and at eighteen had made a passionate love match with a good-looking young Indian civilian, named Fane. They had loved each other to a standstill in twelve months. Then had begun five years of petulance, boredom, and growing cynicism, with increasing spells of Simla, and voyages home for her health which was really harmed by the heat. All had culminated, of course, in another passion for a rifleman called Lynch. Divorce had followed, remarriage, and then the Boer War, in which he had been badly wounded. She had gone out and nursed him

back to half his robust health, and, at twenty-eight, taken up life with him on an up-country farm in Cape Colony. This middle period had lasted ten years, between the lonely farm and an old Dutch house at High Constantia. Lynch was not a bad fellow, but, like most soldiers of the old Army, had been quite carefully divested of an æsthetic sense. And it was Leila's misfortune to have moments when æsthetic sense seemed necessary. She had struggled to overcome this weakness, and that other weakness of hers—a liking for men's admiration; but there had certainly been intervals when she had not properly succeeded. Her acquaintance with Jimmy Fort had occurred during one of these intervals, and when he went back to England so abruptly, she had been feeling very tenderly towards him. She still remembered him with a certain pleasure. Before Lynch died, these "intervals" had been interruped by a spell of returning warmth for the invalided man to whom she had joined her life under the romantic conditions of divorce. He had failed, of course, as a farmer, and his death left her with nothing but her own settled income of a hundred and fifty pounds a year. Faced by the prospect of having almost to make her living, at thirty-eight, she felt but momentary dismay—for she had real pluck. Like many who have played with amateur theatricals, she fancied herself as an actress; but, after much effort, found that only her voice and the perfect preservation of her legs were appreciated by the discerning managers and public of South Africa; and for three chequered years she made face against fortune with the help of them, under an assumed name. What she did—keeping a certain bloom of refinement, was far better than the achievements of many more respectable ladies in her shoes. At least she never bemoaned her "reduced circumstances," and if her life was irregular and had at least three episodes, it was very human. She bravely took the rough with the smooth, never lost the power of enjoying herself, and grew in sympathy with the hardships of others. But she became deadly tired. When the war broke out, remembering that she was a good nurse, she took her real name again and a change of occupation. For one who liked to please men, and to be pleased by them, there was a certain attraction about that life in war-time; and after two years of it she could still appreciate the way her Tommies turned their heads to look at her when she passed their beds. But in a hard school she had learned perfect self-control; and though the sour and puritanical perceived

her attraction, they knew her to be forty-three. Besides, the soldiers liked her; and there was little trouble in her wards. The war moved her in simple ways; for she was patriotic in the direct fashion of her class. Her father had been a sailor, her husband's an official and a soldier; the issue for her was uncomplicated by any abstract meditation. The Country before everything! And though she had tended during those two years so many young wrecked bodies, she had taken it as all in the day's work, lavishing her sympathy on the individual, without much general sense of pity and waste. Yes, she had worked really hard, had "done her bit"; but of late she had felt rising within her the old vague craving for "life," for pleasure, for something more than the mere negative admiration bestowed on her by her "Tommies." Those old letters—to look them through had been a sure sign of this vague craving—had sharpened to poignancy the feeling that life was slipping away from her while she was still comely. She had been long out of England, and so hard-worked since she came back that there were not many threads she could pick up suddenly. Two letters out of that little budget of the past, with a far cry between them, had awakened within her certain sentimental longings.

"Dear Lady of the Starry Flowers,

"Exiturus (sic) te saluto! The tender carries you this message of good-bye. Simply speaking, I hate leaving South Africa. And of all my memories, the last will live the longest. Grape harvest at Constantia, and you singing: 'If I could be the falling dew.' If ever you and your husband come to England, do let me know, that I may try and repay a little the happiest five days I've spent out here.

"Your very faithful servant,

"Jimmy Fort."

She remembered a very brown face, a tall slim figure, and something gallant about the whole of him. What was he like after ten years? Grizzled, married, with a large family? An odious thing—Time! And Cousin Edward's little yellow letter. Good heavens! Twenty-six years ago—before he was a parson, or married or anything! Such a good partner, really musical; a queer, dear fellow, devoted, absent-minded, easily shocked, yet with flame burning in him somewhere.

"Dear Leila,

"After our last dance I went straight off—I couldn't go in. I went down to the river, and walked along the bank; it was beautiful, all grey and hazy, and the trees whispered, and the cows looked holy; and I walked along and thought of you. And a farmer took me for a lunatic, in my dress clothes. Dear Leila, you were so pretty last night, and I did love our dances. I hope you are not tired, and that I shall see you soon again.

"Your affectionate cousin,

"Edward Pierson."

And then he had gone and become a parson, and married, and been a widower fifteen years. She remembered the death of his wife, just before she left for South Africa, at that period of disgrace when she had so shocked her family by her divorce. Poor Edward—quite the nicest of her cousins! The only one she would care to see again. He would be very old and terribly good and proper, by now!

Her wheel of Regent's Park was coming full circle, and the sun was up behind the houses, but still no sound of traffic stirred. She stopped before a flower-bed where was some heliotrope, and took a long, luxurious sniff. She could not resist plucking a sprig, too, and holding it to her nose. A sudden want of love had run through every nerve and fibre of her; she shivered, standing there with her eyes half closed, above the pale violet blossom. Then, noting by her wrist-watch that it was four o'clock, she hurried on, to get to her bed, for she would have to be on duty again at noon. Oh! the war! She was tired! If only it were over, and one could live! . . .

Somewhere by Twickenham the moon had floated down; somewhere up from Kentish Town the sun came soaring; wheels rolled again, and the seven million sleepers in their million houses woke from morning sleep to that same thought. . . .

IX

Edward Pierson, dreaming over an egg at breakfast, opened a letter in a handwriting which he did not recognise.

"V. A. D. Hospital,
"Mulberry Road, St. John's Wood N. W.

"Dear Cousin Edward,

"Do you remember me, or have I gone too far into the shades of night? I was Leila Pierson once upon a time, and I often think of you and wonder what you are like now, and what your girls are like. I have been here nearly a year, working for our wounded, and for a year before that was nursing in South Africa. My husband died five years ago out there. Though we haven't met for I dare not think how long. I should awfully like to see you again. Would you care to come some day and look over my hospital? I have two wards under me; our men are rather dears.

"Your forgotten but still affectionate cousin
"Leila Lynch."

"P. S. I came across a little letter you once wrote me; it brought back old days."

No! He had not forgotten. There was a reminder in the house. And he looked up at Noel sitting opposite. How like the eyes were! And he thought: 'I wonder what Leila has become. One mustn't be uncharitable. That man is dead; she has been nursing two years. She must be greatly changed; I should certainly like to see her. I will go!' Again he looked at Noel. Only yesterday she had renewed her request to be allowed to begin her training as a nurse.

"I'm going to see a hospital to-day, Nollie," he said; "if you like, I'll make enquiries. I'm afraid it'll mean you have to begin by washing up."

"I know; anything, so long as I do begin."

"Very well; I'll see about it." And he went back to his egg.

Noel's voice roused him. "Do you feel the war much, Daddy? Does it hurt you here?" She had put her hand on her heart.

"Perhaps it doesn't, because you live half in the next world, don't you?"

The words: "God forbid," sprang to Pierson's lips; he did not speak them, but put his egg-spoon down, hurt and bewildered. What did the child mean? Not feel the war!

"I hope I'm able to help people sometimes, Nollie," and was conscious that he had answered his own thoughts, not her words. He finished his breakfast quickly, and very soon went out. He crossed the Square, and passed East, down two crowded streets to his church. In the traffic of those streets, all slipshod and confused, his black-clothed figure and grave face, with its Vandyk beard, had a curious remote appearance, like a moving remnant of a past civilisation. He went in by the side door. Only five days he had been away, but they had been so full of emotion that the empty familiar building seemed almost strange to him. He had come there unconsciously, groping for anchorage and guidance in this sudden change of relationship between him and his daughters. He stood by the pale brazen eagle, staring into the chancel. The choir were wanting new hymn-books—he must not forget to order them! His eyes sought the stained-glass window he had put in to the memory of his wife. The sun, too high to slant, was burnishing its base, till it glowed of a deep sherry colour. "In the next world!" What strange words of Noel's! His eyes caught the glimmer of the organ-pipes; and mounting to the loft, he began to play soft chords wandering into each other. He finished, and stood gazing down. This space within high walls, under high vaulted roof, where light was toned to a perpetual twilight, broken here and there by a little glow of colour from glass and flowers, metal, and dark wood, was his home, his charge, his refuge. Nothing moved down there, and yet—was not emptiness mysteriously living, the closed-in air imprinted in strange sort, as though the drone of music and voices in prayer and praise clung there still? Had not sanctity a presence? Outside, a barrel-organ drove its tune along; a wagon staggered on the paved street, and the driver shouted to his horses; some distant guns boomed out in practice, and the rolling of wheels on wheels formed a net of sound. But those invading noises were transmuted to a mere murmuring in here; only the silence and the twilight were real to Pierson, standing there, a little black figure in a great empty space.

When he left the church, it was still rather early to go to

Leila's hospital; and, having ordered the new hymn-books, he called in at the house of a parishioner whose son had been killed in France. He found her in her kitchen; an oldish woman who lived by charing. She wiped a seat for the Vicar.

"I was just makin' meself a cup o' tea, sir."

"Ah! What a comfort tea is, Mrs. Soles!" And he sat down, so that she should feel "at home."

"Yes; it gives me 'eart-burn; I take eight or ten cups a day, now. I take 'em strong, too. I don't seem able to get on without it. I 'ope the young ladies are well, sir?"

"Very well, thank you. Miss Noel is going to begin nursing, too."

"Deary—me! She's very young; but all the young gells are doin' something these days. I've got a niece in munitions—makin' a pretty penny she is. I've been meanin' to tell you—I don't come to church now; since my son was killed, I don't seem to 'ave the 'eart to go anywhere—'aven't been to a picture-palace these three months. Any excitement starts me cryin'."

"I know; but you'd find rest in church."

Mrs. Soles shook her head, and the small twisted bob of her discoloured hair wobbled vaguely.

"I can't take any recreation," she said. "I'd rather sit 'ere, or be at work. My son was a real son to me. This tea's the only thing that does me any good. I can make you a fresh cup in a minute."

"Thank you, Mrs. Soles, but I must be getting on. We must all look forward to meeting our beloved again, in God's mercy. And one of these days soon I shall be seeing you in church, shan't I?"

Mrs. Soles shifted her weight from one slippered foot to the other.

"Well, let's 'ope so," she said. "But I dunno when I shall 'ave the spirit. Good day, sir, and thank you kindly for calling, I'm sure."

Pierson walked away with a very faint smile. Poor queer old soul!—she was no older than himself, but he thought of her as ancient—cut off from her son, like so many—so many; and how good and patient! The melody of an anthem began running in his head. His fingers moved on the air beside him, and he stood still, waiting for an omnibus to take him to St. John's Wood. A thousand people went by while he was waiting, but he did not notice them, thinking of that anthem, of

his daughters, and the mercy of God; and on the top of his 'bus, when it came along, he looked lonely and apart, though the man beside him was so fat that there was hardly any seat left to sit on. Getting down at Lord's Cricket-ground, he asked his way of a lady in a nurse's dress.

"If you'll come with me," she said, "I'm just going there."

"Oh! Do you happen to know a Mrs. Lynch who nurses——"

"I am Mrs. Lynch. Why, you're Edward Pierson!"

He looked into her face, which he had not yet observed.

"Leila!" he said.

"Yes, Leila! How awfully nice of you to come, Edward!"

They continued to stand, searching each for the other's youth, till she murmured:

"In spite of your beard, I should have known you anywhere!" But she thought: 'Poor Edward! He *is* old, and monk-like!'

And Pierson, in answer, murmured:

"You're very little changed, Leila! We haven't seen each other since my youngest girl was born. She's just a little like you." But he thought: 'My Nollie! So much more dewy; poor Leila!'

They walked on, talking of his daughters, till they reached the hospital.

"If you'll wait here a minute, I'll take you over my wards."

She had left him in a bare hall, holding his hat in one hand and touching his gold cross with the other; but she soon came back, and a little warmth crept about his heart. How works of mercy suited women! She looked so different, so much softer, beneath the white coif, with a white apron over the bluish frock.

At the change in his face, a little warmth crept about Leila, too, just where the bib of her apron stopped; and her eyes slid round at him while they went towards what had once been a billiard-room.

"My men are dears," she said; "they love to be talked to."

Under a skylight six beds jutted out from a green distempered wall, opposite to six beds jutting out from another green distempered wall, and from each bed a face was turned towards them—young faces, with but little expression in them. A nurse, at the far end, looked round, and went on with her work. The sight of the ward was no more new to Pierson than to anyone else in these days. It was so familiar, indeed, that it had practically no significance. He stood by the first bed, and

Leila stood alongside. The man smiled up when she spoke, and did not smile when he spoke, and that again was familiar to him. They passed from bed to bed, with exactly the same result, till she was called away, and he sat down by a young soldier with a long, very narrow head and face, and a heavily bandaged shoulder. Touching the bandage reverently, Pierson said:

"Well, my dear fellow—still bad?"

"Ah!" replied the soldier. "Shrapnel wound. It's cut the flesh properly."

"But not the spirit, I can see!"

The young soldier gave him a quaint look, as much as to say: "Not 'arf bad!" and a gramophone close to the last bed began to play: "God bless Daddy at the war!"

"Are you fond of music?"

"I like it well enough. Passes the time."

"I'm afraid the time hangs heavy in hospital."

"Yes; it 'angs a bit 'eavy; it's just 'orspital life. I've been wounded before, you see. It's better than bein' out there. I expect I'll lose the proper use o' this arm. I don't worry; I'll get my discharge."

"You've got some good nurses here."

"Yes; I like Mrs. Lynch; she's the lady I like."

"My cousin."

"I see you come in together. I see everything 'ere. I think a lot, too. Passes the time."

"Do they let you smoke?"

"Oh, yes! They let us smoke."

"Have one of mine?"

The young soldier smiled for the first time. "Thank you; I've got plenty."

The nurse came by, and smiled at Pierson.

"He's one of our blasé ones; been in before, haven't you, Simson?"

Pierson looked at the young man, whose long, narrow face, where one sandy-lashed eyelid drooped just a little, seemed armoured with a sort of limited omniscience. The gramophone had whirred and grunted into "Sidi Brahim." The nurse passed on.

"'Seedy Abraham,'" said the young soldier. "The Frenchies sing it; they takes it up one after the other, ye know."

"Ah!" murmured Pierson; "it's pretty." And his fingers

drummed on the counterpane, for the tune was new to him. Something seemed to move in the young man's face, as if a blind had been drawn up a little.

"I don't mind France," he said abruptly; "I don't mind the shells and that; but I can't stick the mud. There's a lot o' wounded die in the mud; can't get up—smothered." His unwounded arm made a restless movement. "I was nearly smothered myself. Just managed to keep me nose up."

Pierson shuddered. "Thank God you did!"

"Yes; I didn't like that. I told Mrs. Lynch about that one day when I had the fever. She's a nice lady; she's seen a lot of us boys. That mud's not right, you know." And again his unwounded arm made that restless movement, while the gramophone struck up: "The boys in brown." The movement of the arm affected Pierson horribly; he rose and, touching the bandaged shoulder, said:

"Good-bye; I hope you'll soon be quite recovered."

The young soldier's lips twisted in the semblance of a smile; his drooped eyelid seemed to try and raise itself.

"Good day, sir," he said; "and thank you."

Pierson went back to the hall. The sunlight fell in a pool just inside the open door, and an uncontrollable impulse made him move into it, so that it warmed him up to the waist. The mud! How ugly life was! Life and Death! Both ugly! Poor boys! Poor boys!

A voice behind him said:

"Oh! There you are, Edward! Would you like to see the other ward, or shall I show you our kitchen?"

Pierson took her hand impulsively. "You're doing a noble work, Leila. I wanted to ask you: Could you arrange for Noel to come and get trained here? She wants to begin at once. The fact is, a boy she is attracted to has just gone out to the Front.

"Ah!" murmured Leila, and her eyes looked very soft. "Poor child! We shall be wanting an extra hand next week. I'll see if she could come now. I'll speak to our Matron, and let you know to-night." She squeezed his hand hard.

"Dear Edward, I'm so glad to see you again. You're the first of our family I've seen for sixteen years. I wonder if you'd bring Noel to have supper at my flat to-night—just nothing to eat, you know! It's a tiny place. There's a Captain Fort coming; a nice man."

Pierson accepted, and as he walked away he thought: 'Dear Leila! I believe it was Providence. She wants sympathy. She wants to feel the past is the past. How good women are!'

And the sun, blazing suddenly out of a cloud, shone on his black figure and the little gold cross, in the middle of Portland Place.

X

Men, even if they are not artistic, who have been in strange places and known many nooks of the world, get the scenic habit, become open to pictorial sensation. It was as a picture or series of pictures that Jimmy Fort ever afterwards remembered his first supper at Leila's. He happened to have been all day in the open, motoring about to horse farms under a hot sun; and Leila's hock cup possessed a bland and subtle strength. The scenic sense derived therefrom had a certain poignancy, the more so because the tall child whom he met there did not drink it, and her father seemed but to wet his lips, so that Leila and he had all the rest. Rather a wonderful little scene it made in his mind, very warm, glowing, yet with a strange dark sharpness to it, which came perhaps from the black walls.

The flat had belonged to an artist who was at the war. It was but a pocket dwelling on the third floor. The two windows of the little square sitting-room looked out on some trees and a church. But Leila, who hated dining by daylight, had soon drawn curtains of a deep blue over them. The picture which Fort remembered was this: A little four-square table of dark wood, with a Chinese mat of vivid blue in the centre, whereon stood a silver lustre bowl of clove carnations; some greenish glasses with hock cup in them; on his left, Leila in a low lilac frock, her neck and shoulders very white, her face a little powdered, her eyes large, her lips smiling; opposite him a black-clothed padre with a little gold cross, over whose thin darkish face, with its grave pointed beard, passed little gentle smiles, but whose deep sunk grey eyes were burnt and bright; on his right, a girl in a high grey frock, almost white, just hollowed at the neck, with full sleeves to the elbow, so that her slim arms escaped; her short fair hair a little tumbled; her big grey eyes grave; her full lips shaping with a strange daintiness round every word—and they not many; brilliant red shades over golden lights dotting the black walls; a blue divan; a little black piano flush with the wall; a dark polished floor; four Japanese prints; a white ceiling. He was conscious that his own khaki spoiled something as curious and rare as some old Chinese tea-chest. He even remembered what they ate; lobster; cold pigeon

pie; asparagus; St. Ivel cheese; raspberries and cream. He did not remember half so well what they talked of, except that he himself told them stories of the Boer War, in which he had served in the Yeomanry, and while he was telling them, the girl, like a child listening to a fairy-tale, never moved her eyes from his face. He remembered that after supper they all smoked cigarettes, even the tall child, after the padre had said to her mildly, "My dear!" and she had answered: "I simply must, Daddy, just one." He remembered Leila brewing Turkish coffee—very good, and how beautiful her white arms looked, hovering about the cups. He remembered her making the padre sit down at the piano, and play to them. And she and the girl on the divan together, side by side, a strange contrast; with just as strange a likeness to each other. He always remembered how fine and rare that music sounded in the little room, flooding him with a dreamy beatitude. Then—he remembered—Leila sang, the padre standing by; and the tall child on the divan bending forward over her knees, with her chin on her hands. He remembered rather vividly how Leila turned her neck and looked up, now at the padre, now at himself; and, all through, the delightful sense of colour and warmth, a sort of glamour over all the evening; and the lingering pressure of Leila's hand when he said good-bye and they went away, for they all went together. He remembered talking a great deal to the padre in the cab, about the public school they had both been at, and thinking: 'It's a good padre—this!' He remembered how their taxi took them to an old Square which he did not know, where the garden trees looked densely black in the starshine. He remembered that a man outside the house had engaged the padre in earnest talk, while the tall child and himself stood in the open doorway, where the hall beyond was dark. Very exactly he remembered the little conversation which then took place between them, while they waited for her father.

"Is it very horrid in the trenches, Captain Fort?"

"Yes, Miss Pierson; it is very horrid, as a rule."

"Is it dangerous all the time?"

"Pretty well."

"Do officers run more risks than the men?"

"Not unless there's an attack."

"Are there attacks very often?"

It had seemed to him so strangely primitive a little catechism, that he had smiled. And, though it was so dark, she had seen

that smile, for her face went proud and close all of a sudden. He had cursed himself, and said gently:

"Have you a brother out there?"

She shook her head.

"But someone?"

"Yes."

Someone! He had heard that answer with a little shock. This child—this fairy princess of a child already to have someone! He wondered if she went about asking everyone these questions, with that someone in her thoughts. Poor child! And quickly he said:

"After all, look at me! I was out there a year, and here I am with only half a game leg; times were a lot worse, then, too. I often wish I were back there. Anything's better than London and the War Office." But just then he saw the padre coming, and took her hand.

"Good night, Miss Pierson. Don't worry. That does no good, and there isn't half the risk you think."

Her hand stirred, squeezed his gratefully, as a child's would squeeze.

"Good night," she murmured; "thank you awfully."

And, in the dark cab again, he remembered thinking: 'Fancy that child! A jolly lucky boy, out there! Too bad! Poor little fairy princess!'

PART II

I

1 §

To wash up is not an exciting operation. To wash up in August became for Noel a process which taxed her strength and enthusiasm. She combined it with other forms of instruction in the art of nursing, had very little leisure, and in the evenings at home would often fall asleep curled up in a large chintz-covered chair.

George and Gratian had long gone back to their respective hospitals, and she and her father had the house to themselves. She received many letters from Cyril which she carried about with her and read on her way to and from the hospital; and every other day she wrote to him. He was not yet in the firing line; his letters were descriptive of his men, his food, or the natives, or reminiscent of Kestrel; hers descriptive of washing up, or reminiscent of Kestrel. But in both there was always some little word of the longing within them.

It was towards the end of August when she had the letter which said that he had been moved up. From now on he would be in hourly danger! That evening after dinner she did not go to sleep in the chair, but sat under the open window, clenching her hands, and reading "Pride and Prejudice" without understanding a word. While she was so engaged her father came up:

"Captain Fort, Nollie. Will you give him some coffee? I have to go out."

When he had gone, Noel looked at her visitor drinking his coffee. He had been out there, too, and he was alive; with only a little limp. The visitor smiled and said:

"What were you thinking about when we came in?"

"Only the war."

"Any news of him?"

Noel frowned.

"Yes! he's gone to the Front. Won't you have a cigarette?"

"Thanks. Will you?"

"I want one awfully. I think sitting still and waiting is more dreadful than anything in the world."

"Except knowing that others are waiting. When I was out there I used to worry horribly over my mother. She was ill at the time. The cruelest thing in war is the anxiety of people about each other—nothing touches that."

The words exactly summed up Noel's hourly thought. He said nice things, this man with the long legs and the thin brown bumpy face!

"I wish I were a man," she said, "I think women have much the worst time in the war. Is your mother old?" But of course she was old—why he was old himself!

"She died last Christmas."

"Oh! I'm so sorry!"

"You lost your mother when you were a babe, didn't you?"

"Yes. That's her portrait." At the end of the room, hanging on a strip of black velvet was a pastel, very faint in colouring, as though faded, of a young woman, with an eager, sweet face, dark eyes, and bent a little forward, as if questioning her painter. Fort went up to it.

"It's not a bit like you. But she must have been a very sweet woman."

"It's a sort of presence in the room. I wish I *were* like her!"

Fort turned. "No," he said; "no. Better as you are. It would only have spoiled a complete thing."

"She was good."

"And aren't you?"

"Oh! no. I get a devil."

"You! Why, you're out of a fairy-tale!"

"It comes from Daddy—only he doesn't know, because he's a perfect saint; but I know he's had a devil somewhere, or he couldn't be the saint he is."

"H'm!" said Fort. "That's very deep: and I believe it's true—the saints did have devils."

"Poor Daddy's devil has been dead ages. It's been starved out of him, I think."

"Does your devil ever get away with you?"

Noel felt her cheeks growing red under his stare, and she turned to the window:

"Yes. It's a real devil."

Vividly there had come before her the dark Abbey, and the moon balancing over the top of the crumbling wall, and the white owl flying across. And, speaking to the air, she said:

"It makes you do things that you want to do."

She wondered if he would laugh—it sounded so silly. But he did not.

"And damn the consequences? I know. It's rather a jolly thing to have."

Noel shook her head. "Here's Daddy coming back!"

Fort held out his hand.

"I won't stay. Good night; and don't worry too much, will you?"

He kept her hand rather a long time, and gave it a hard squeeze.

Don't worry! What advice! Cyril!

2 §

In September, 1916, Saturday still came before Sunday, in spite of the war. For Edward Pierson this Saturday had been a strenuous day, and even now, at nearly midnight, he was still conning his just-completed sermon.

A patriot, he had often a passionate longing to resign his parish, and go like his curate for a chaplain at the Front. It seemed to him that people must think his life idle and sheltered and useless. Even in times of peace he had been sensitive enough to feel the cold draughty blasts which the Church encounters in a material age. He knew that nine people out of ten looked on him as something of a parasite, with no real work in the world. And since he was nothing if not conscientious, he worked himself to the bone.

To-day he had risen at half-past six, and after his bath and exercises, had sat down to his sermon—for, even now, he wrote a new sermon once a month, though he had the fruits of twenty-six years to choose from. True, these new sermons were rather compiled than written, because, bereft of his curate, he had not time enough for fresh thought on old subjects. At eight he had breakfasted with Noel, before she went off to her hospital, whence she would return at eight in the evening. Nine to ten was his hour for seeing parishioners who had troubles, or wanted help or advice, and he had received three to-day who all wanted help, which he had given. From ten to eleven he had gone back

to his sermon, and had spent from eleven to one at his church, attending to small matters, writing notices, fixing hymns, holding the daily half-hour Service instituted during war-time, to which but few ever came. He had hurried back to lunch, scamping it so that he might get to his piano for an hour of forgetfulness. At three he had christened a very noisy baby, and been detained by its parents who wished for information on a variety of topics. At half-past four he had snatched a cup of tea, reading the paper; and had spent from five to seven visiting two Parish Clubs, and those whose war-pension matters he had in hand, and filling up forms which would be kept in official places till such time as the system should be changed and a fresh set of forms issued. From seven to eight he was at home again, in case his flock wanted to see him; to-day four sheep had come, and gone away, he was afraid, but little the wiser. From half-past eight to half-past nine he had spent in choir practice, because the organist was on his holiday. Slowly in the cool of the evening he had walked home, and fallen asleep in his chair on getting in. At eleven he had woken with a start, and, hardening his heart, had gone back to his sermon. And now, at nearly midnight, it was still less than twenty minutes long. He lighted one of his rare cigarettes, and let thought wander. How beautiful those pale pink roses were in that old silver bowl—like a little strange poem, or a piece of Debussy music, or a Mathieu Maris picture—reminding him oddly of the word Leila. Was he wrong in letting Noel see so much of Leila? But then she was so improved—dear Leila! . . . The pink roses were just going to fall! And yet how beautiful! . . . It was quiet to-night; he felt very drowsy. . . . Did Nollie still think of that young man, or had it passed? She had never confided in him since! After the war, it would be nice to take her to Italy, to all the little towns. They would see the Assisi of St. Francis. The Little Flowers of St. Francis. The Little Flowers! . . . His hand dropped, the cigarette went out. He slept with his face in shadow. Slowly into the silence of his sleep little sinister sounds intruded. Short concussions, dragging him back out of that deep slumber. He started up. Noel was standing at the door, in a long coat. She said in her calm voice:

"Zeps, Daddy!"

"Yes, my dear. Where are the maids?"

An Irish voice answered from the hall: "Here, sir, trustin' in God; but 'tis better on the ground floor."

He saw a huddle of three figures, queerly costumed, against the stairs.

"Yes, yes, Bridgie; you're safe down here." Then he noticed that Noel was gone. He followed her out into the Square, alive with faces faintly luminous in the darkness, and found her against the garden railings.

"You must come back in, Nollie."

"Oh, no! Cyril has this every day."

He stood beside her; not loth, for excitement had begun to stir his blood. They stayed there for some minutes, straining their eyes for sight of anything save the little zagged splashes of bursting shrapnel, while voices buzzed, and muttered: "Look! There! There! There it is!"

But the seers had eyes of greater faith than Pierson's for he saw nothing. He took her arm at last, and led her in. In the hall she broke from him.

"Let's go up on the roof, Daddy!" and ran upstairs.

Again he followed, mounting by a ladder, through a trap-door on to the roof.

"It's splendid up here!" she cried.

He could see her eyes blazing, and thought: 'How my child does love excitement—it's almost terrible!'

Over the wide, dark, star-strewn sky travelling search-lights were lighting up the few little clouds; the domes and spires rose from among the spread-out roofs, all fine and ghostly. The guns had ceased firing, as though puzzled. One distant bang rumbled out.

"A bomb! Oh! If we could only get one of the Zeps!"

A furious outburst of firing followed, lasting perhaps a minute, then ceased as if by magic. They saw two search-lights converge and meet right overhead.

"It's above us!" murmured Noel.

Pierson put his arm round her waist. 'She feels no fear!' he thought. The search-lights switched apart; and suddenly, from far away, came a confusion of weird sounds.

"What is it? They're cheering. Oh! Daddy, look!" There in the heavens, towards the east, hung a dull red thing, lengthening as they gazed.

"*They've got it.* It's on fire! Hurrah!"

Through the dark firmament that fiery orange shape began canting downward; and the cheering swelled in a savage frenzy of sound. And Pierson's arm tightened on her waist.

"Thank God!" he muttered.

The bright oblong seemed to break and spread, tilted down below the level of the roofs; and suddenly the heavens flared, as if some huge jug of crimson light had been flung out on them. Something turned over in Pierson's heart; he flung up his hand to his eyes.

"The poor men in it!" he said. "How terrible!"

Noel's voice answered, hard and pitiless:

"They needn't have come. They're murderers!"

Yes, they were murderers—but how terrible! And he stood quivering, with his hands pressed to his face, till the cheering had died out into silence.

"Let's pray, Nollie!" he whispered. "O God, Who in Thy great mercy hath delivered us from peril, take into Thy keeping the souls of these our enemies, consumed by Thy wrath before our eyes; give us the power to pity them—men like ourselves."

But even while he prayed he could see Noel's face flame-white in the darkness; and, as that glow in the sky faded out, he felt once more the thrill of triumph.

They went down to tell the maids, and for some time after sat up together, talking over what they had seen, eating biscuits and drinking milk, which they warmed on an etna. It was nearly two o'clock before they went to bed. Pierson fell asleep at once, and never turned till awakened at half-past six by his alarum. He had Holy Communion to administer at eight, and he hurried to get early to his church and see that nothing untoward had happened to it. There it stood in the sunlight; tall, grey, unharmed, with bell gently ringing.

3 §

And at that hour Cyril Morland, under the parapet of his trench, tightening his belt, was looking at his wrist-watch for the hundredth time, calculating exactly where he meant to put foot and hand for the going over: 'I absolutely mustn't let those chaps get in front of me,' he thought. So many yards before the first line of trenches, so many yards to the second line, and there stop. So his rehearsals had gone; it was the performance now! Another minute before the terrific racket of the drum-fire should become the curtain-fire, which would advance before them. He ran his eye down the trench. The man next him was licking his two first fingers, as if he might be

doing to bowl at cricket. Further down, a man was feeling his puttees. A voice said: 'Wot price the orchestra nah!" He saw teeth gleam in faces burnt almost black. Then he looked up; the sky was blue beyond the brownish film of dust raised by the striking shells. Noel! Noel! Noel. . . . He dug his fingers deep into the left side of his tunic till he could feel the outline of her photograph between his dispatch-case and his heart. His heart fluttered just as it used when he was stretched out with hand touching the ground, before the start of the "hundred yards" at school. Out of the corner of his eye he caught the flash of a man's "briquet" lighting a cigarette. All right for those chaps, but not for him; he wanted all his breath —this rifle, and kit were handicap enough! Two days ago he had been reading in some paper how men felt just before an attack. And now he knew. He just felt nervous. If only the moment would come, and get itself over! For all the thought he gave to the enemy there might have been none—nothing but shells and bullets, with lives of their own. He heard the whistle; his foot was on the spot he had marked down; his hand where he had seen it; he called out: "Now, boys!" His head was over the top, his body over; he was conscious of someone falling, and two men neck and neck beside him. Not to try and run, not to break out of a walk; to go steady, and yet keep ahead! D——n these holes! A bullet tore through his sleeve, grazing his arm—a red-hot sensation, like the touch of an iron. A British shell from close over his head burst sixty yards ahead; he stumbled, fell flat, picked himself up. Three ahead of him now! He walked faster, and drew alongside. Two of them fell. 'What luck!' he thought; and gripping his rifle harder, pitched headlong into a declivity. Dead bodies lay there! The first German trench line, and nothing alive in it, nothing to clean up, nothing of it left! He stopped, getting his wind; watching the men panting and stumbling in. The roar of the guns was louder than ever again, barraging the second line. So far, good! And here was his captain!

"Ready, boys? On, then!"

This time he moved more slowly still, over terrible going, all holes and hummocks. Half consciously he took cover all he could. The air was alive with the whistle from machine-gun fire storming across zigzag fashion—alive it was with bullets, dust, and smoke. 'How shall I tell her?' he thought. There would be nothing to tell but just a sort of jagged brown sen-

sation. He kept his eyes steadily before him, not wanting to see the men falling, not wanting anything to divert him from getting there. He felt the faint fanning of the passing bullets. The second line must be close now. Why didn't that barrage lift? Was this new dodge of firing till the last second going to do them in? Another hundred yards and he would be bang into it. He flung himself flat and waited; looking at his wrist-watch he noted that his arm was soaked with blood. He thought: 'A wound! Now I shall go home. Thank God! Oh, Noel!' The passing bullets whirled above him; he could hear them even through the screech and thunder of the shell-fire. 'The beastly things!' he thought. A voice beside him gasped out:

"It's lifted, sir."

He called: "Come on, boys!" and went forward, stooping. A bullet struck his rifle. The shock made him stagger and sent an electric shock spinning up his arm. 'Luck again!' he thought. 'Now for it! I haven't seen a German yet!' He leaped forward, spun round, flung up his arms, and fell on his back, shot through and through. . . .

4 §

The position was consolidated, as they say, and in the darkness stretcher-bearers were out over the half-mile. Like will-o'-the-wisps, with their shaded lanterns, they moved, hour after hour, slowly quartering the black honeycomb which lay behind the new British line. Now and then in the light of some star-shell their figures were disclosed, bending and raising the forms of the wounded, or wielding pick and shovel.

"Officer."

"Dead?"

"Sure."

"Search."

From the shaded lantern, lowered to just above the body, a yellowish glare fell on face and breast. The hands of the searcher moved in that little pool of light. The bearer who was taking notes bent down.

"Another boy," he said. "That all he has?"

The searcher raised himself.

"Just those, and a photo."

"Dispatch-case; pound loose; cigarette-case; wrist-watch; photo. Let's see it."

The searcher placed the photo in the pool of light. The tiny face of a girl stared up at them, unmoved, from its short hair.

"Noel," said the searcher, reading.

"H'm! Take care of it. Stick it in his case. Come on!"

The pool of light dissolved, and darkness for ever covered Cyril Morland.

II

1 §

When those four took their seats in the Grand Circle at Queen's Hall the programme was already at the second number, which, in spite of all the efforts of patriotism, was of German origin —a Brandenburg concerto by Bach. More curious still, it was encored. Pierson did not applaud, he was too far gone in pleasure, and sat with a rapt smile on his face, oblivious of his surroundings. He remained this removed from mortal joys and sorrows till the last applause had died away, and Leila's voice said in his ear:

"Isn't it a wonderful audience, Edward? Look at all that khaki. Who'd have thought those young men cared for music—good music—German music, too?"

Pierson looked down at the patient mass of standing figures in straw hats and military caps, with faces turned all one way, and sighed.

"I wish I could get an audience like that in my church."

A smile crept out at the corner of Leila's lips. She was thinking: 'Ah! Your Church is out of date, my dear, and so are you! Your Church, with its smell of mould and incense, its stained-glass, and narrowed length and droning organ. Poor Edward, so out of the world!' But she only pressed his arm, and whispered:

"Look at Noel!"

The girl was talking to Jimmy Fort. Her cheeks were flushed, and she looked prettier than Pierson had seen her look for a long time now, ever since Kestrel, indeed. He heard Leila sigh.

"Does she get news of her boys? Do you remember that May Week, Edward? We were very young then; even you were young. That was such a pretty little letter you wrote me. I can see you still—wandering in your dress clothes along the river, among the 'holy' cows."

But her eyes slid round again, watching her other neighbour and the girl. A violinist had begun to play the César Franck Sonata. It was Pierson's favourite piece of music, bringing him,

as it were, a view of heaven, of devotional blue air where devout stars were shining in a sunlit noon, above ecstatic trees and waters where ecstatic swans were swimming.

"Queer world, Mr. Pierson! Fancy those boys having to go back to barrack life after listening to that! What's your feeling? Are we moving back to the apes? Did we touch top note with that Sonata?"

Pierson turned and contemplated his questioner shrewdly.

"No, Captain Fort, I do not think we are moving back to the apes; if we ever came from them. Those boys have the souls of heroes!"

"I know that, sir, perhaps better than you do."

"Ah! yes," said Pierson humbly, "I forgot, of course." But he still looked at his neighbour doubtfully. This Captain Fort, who was a friend of Leila's, and who had twice been to see them, puzzled him. He had a frank face, a frank voice, but queer opinions, or so it seemed to Pierson—little bits of Moslemism, little bits of the backwoods, and the veldt; queer unexpected cynicisms, all sorts of side views on England had lodged in him, and he did not hide them. They came from him like bullets, in that frank voice, and drilled little holes in the listener. Those critical sayings flew so much more poignantly from one who had been through the same educational mill as himself, than if they had merely come from some rough diamond, some artist, some foreigner, even from a doctor like George. And they always made him uncomfortable, like the touch of a prickly leaf; they did not amuse him. Certainly Edward Pierson shrank from the rough touches of a knock-about philosophy. After all, it was but natural that he should.

He and Noel left after the first part of the concert, parting from the other two at the door. He slipped his hand through her arm; and, following out those thoughts of his in the concert-hall, asked.

"Do you like Captain Fort, Nollie?"

"Yes; he's a nice man."

"He seems a nice man, certainly; he has a nice smile, but strange views, I'm afraid."

"He thinks the Germans are not much worse than we are; he says that a good many of us are bullies too."

"Yes, that is the sort of thing I mean."

"But are we, Daddy?"

"Surely not."

"A policeman I talked to once said the same. Captain Fort says that very few men can stand having power put into their hands without being spoiled. He told me some dreadful stories. He says we have no imagination, so that we often do things without seeing how brutal they are."

"We're not perfect, Nollie; but on the whole I think we're a kind people."

Noel was silent a moment, then said suddenly:

"Kind people often think others are kind too, when they really aren't. Captain Fort doesn't made that mistake."

"I think he's a little cynical, and a little dangerous."

"Are all people dangerous who don't think like others, Daddy?"

Pierson, incapable of mockery, was not incapable of seeing when he was being mocked. He looked at his daughter with a smile.

"Not quite so bad as that, Nollie; but Mr. Fort is certainly subversive. I think perhaps he has seen too many queer sides of life."

"I like him the better for that."

"Well, well," Pierson answered absently. He had work to do in preparation for a Confirmation Class, and sought his study on getting in.

Noel went to the dining-room to drink her hot milk. The curtains were not drawn, and bright moonlight was coming in. Without lighting up, she set the etna going, and stood looking at the moon—full for the second time since she and Cyril had waited for it in the Abbey. And pressing her hands to her breast, she shivered. If only she could summon him from the moonlight out there; if only she were a witch—could see him, know where he was, what doing! For a fortnight now she had received no letter. Every day since he had left she had read the casualty lists, with the superstitious feeling that to do so would keep him out of them. She took up the Times. There was just enough light, and she read the roll of honour—till the moon shone in on her, lying on the floor, with the dropped journal. . . .

But she was proud, and soon took grief to her room, as on that night after he left her, she had taken love. No sign betrayed to the house her disaster; the journal on the floor, and the smell of the burnt milk which had boiled over, revealed nothing. After all, she was but one of a thousand hearts which spent that

moonlit night in agony. Each night, year in, year out, a thousand faces were buried in pillows to smother that first awful sense of desolation, and grope for the secret spirit-place where bereaved souls go, to receive some feeble touch of healing from knowledge of each other's trouble. . . .

In the morning she got up from her sleepless bed, seemed to eat her breakfast, and went off to her hospital. There she washed up plates and dishes, with a stony face, dark under the eyes.

§ 2 §

The news came to Pierson in a letter from Thirza, received at lunch time. He read it with a dreadful aching. Poor, poor little Nollie! What an awful trouble for her! And he, too, went about his work with the nightmare thought that he had to break the news to her that evening. Never had he felt more lonely, more dreadfully in want of the mother of his children. She would have known how to soothe, how to comfort. On her heart the child could have sobbed away grief. And all that hour, from seven to eight, when he was usually in readiness to fulfil the functions of God's substitute to his parishioners, he spent in prayer of his own, for guidance how to inflict and heal this blow. When, at last, Noel came, he opened the door to her himself, and, putting back the hair from her forehead, said:

"Come in here a moment, my darling!"

Noel followed him into the study, and sat down.

"I know already, Daddy."

Pierson was more dismayed by this stoicism than he would have been by any natural outburst. He stood, timidly stroking her hair, murmuring to her what he had said to Gratian, and to so many others in these days: "There is no death; look forward to seeing him again; God is merciful." And he marvelled at the calmness of that pale face—so young.

"You are very brave, my child!" he said.

"There's nothing else to be, is there?"

"Isn't there anything I can do for you, Nollie?"

"No, Daddy."

"When did you see it?"

"Last night."

She had already known for twenty-four hours without telling him!

"Have you prayed, my darling?"

"No."

"Try, Nollie!"

"No."

"Ah, try!"

"It would be ridiculous, Daddy; you don't know."

Grievously upset and bewildered, Pierson moved away from her, and said:

"You look dreadfully tired. Would you like a hot bath, and your dinner in bed?"

"I'd like some tea; that's all." And she went out.

When he had seen that the tea had gone up to her, he too went out; and, moved by a longing for woman's help, took a cab to Leila's flat.

III

1 §

On leaving the concert Leila and Jimmy Fort had secured a taxi; a vehicle which, at night, in wartime, has certain advantages for those who desire to become better acquainted. Vibration, sufficient noise, darkness, are guaranteed; and all that is lacking for the furtherance of emotion is the scent of honeysuckle and roses, or even of the white flowering creeper which on the *stoep* at High Constantia had smelled so much sweeter than petrol.

When Leila found herself with Fort in that loneliness to which she had been looking forward, she was overcome by an access of nervous silence. She had been passing through a strange time for weeks past. Every night she examined her sensations without quite understanding them as yet. When a woman comes to her age, the world-force is liable to take possession, saying:

"You were young, you were beautiful, you still have beauty, you are not, cannot be, old. Cling to youth, cling to beauty; take all you can get, before your face gets lines and your hair grey; it is impossible that you have been loved for the last time."

To see Jimmy Fort at the concert, talking to Noel, had brought this emotion to a head. She was not of a grudging nature, and could genuinely admire Noel, but the idea that Jimmy Fort might also admire disturbed her greatly. He must not; it was not fair; he was too old—besides, the girl had her boy; and she had taken care that he should know it. So, leaning towards him, while a bare-shouldered young lady sang, she had whispered: "Penny?" And he had whispered back: "Tell you afterwards."

That had comforted her. She would make him take her home. It was time she showed her heart.

And now, in the cab, resolved to make her feelings known, in sudden shyness she found it very difficult. Love, to which for quite three years she had been a stranger, was come to life within her. The knowledge was at once so sweet, and so disturbing,

that she sat with face averted, unable to turn the precious minutes to account. They arrived at the flat without having done more than agree that the streets were dark, and the moon bright. She got out with a sense of bewilderment, and said rather desperately:

"You must come up and have a cigarette. It's quite early, still."

He went up.

"Wait just a minute," said Leila.

Sitting there with his drink and his cigarette, he stared at some sunflowers in a bowl—Famille Rose—and waited just ten; smiling a little, recalling the nose of the fairy princess, and the dainty way her lips shaped the words she spoke. If she had not had that lucky young devil of a soldier boy, one would have wanted to buckle her shoes, lay one's coat in the mud for her, or whatever they did in fairy-tales. One would have wanted—ah! what would one not have wanted! Hang that soldier boy! Leila said he was twenty-two. By George! how old it made a man feel who was rising forty, and tender on the off-fore! No fairy princesses for him! Then a whiff of perfume came to his nostrils; and, looking up, he saw Leila standing before him, in a long garment of dark silk, whence her white arms peeped out.

"Another penny? Do you remember these things, Jimmy? The Malay women used to wear them in Cape Town. You can't think what a relief it is to get out of my slave's dress. Oh! I'm so sick of nursing! Jimmy, I want to *live* again a little!"

The garment had taken fifteen years off her age, and a gardenia, just where the silk crossed on her breast, seemed no whiter than her skin. He wondered whimsically whether it had dropped to her out of the dark!

"Live?" he said. "Why! Don't you always?"

She raised her hands so that the dark silk fell back from the whole length of those white arms.

"I haven't lived for two years. Oh, Jimmy! Help me to live a little! Life's so short, now."

Her eyes disturbed him, strained and pathetic; the sight of her arms; the scent of the flower disturbed him; he felt his cheeks growing warm, and looked down.

She slipped suddenly forward onto her knees at his feet, took his hand, pressed it with both of hers, and murmured:

"Love me a little! What else is there? Oh! Jimmy, what else is there?"

And with the scent of the flower, crushed by their hands, stirring his senses, Fort thought: 'Ah, what else is there, in these forsaken days?'

2 §

To Jimmy Fort, who had a sense of humour, and was in some sort a philosopher, the haphazard way life settled things seldom failed to seem amusing. But when he walked away from Leila's he was pensive. She was a good sort, a pretty creature, a sportswoman, an enchantress; but—she was decidedly mature. And here he was—involved in helping her to "live"; involved almost alarmingly, for there had been no mistaking the fact that she had really fallen in love with him.

This was flattering and sweet. Times were sad, and pleasure scarce, but——! The roving instinct which had kept him, from his youth up, rolling about the world, shied instinctively at bonds, however pleasant, the strength and thickness of which he could not gauge; or, was it that perhaps for the first time in his life he had been peeping into fairyland of late, and this affair with Leila was by no means fairyland? He had another reason, more unconscious, for uneasiness. His heart, for all his wanderings, was soft, he had always found it difficult to hurt anyone, especially anyone who did him the honour to love him. A sort of presentiment weighed on him while he walked the moonlit streets at this most empty hour, when even the late taxis had ceased to run. Would she want him to marry her? Would it be his duty, if she did? And then he found himself thinking of the concert, and that girl's face, listening to the tales he was telling her. 'Deuced queer world,' he thought, 'the way things go! I wonder what she would think of us, if she knew—and that good padre! Phew!'

He made such very slow progress, for fear of giving way in his leg, and having to spend the night on a door-step, that he had plenty of time for rumination; but since it brought him no confidence whatever, he began at last to feel: 'Well, it might be a lot worse. Take the goods the gods send you and don't fuss!' And suddenly he remembered with extreme vividness that night on the *stoep* at High Constantia, and thought with dismay: 'I could have plunged in over head and ears then; and now—I can't! That's life all over! Poor Leila! *Me miserum,* too, perhaps—who knows!'

IV

When Leila opened her door to Edward Pierson, her eyes were smiling, and her lips were soft. She seemed to smile and be soft all over, and she took both his hands. Everything was a pleasure to her that day, even the sight of this sad face. She was in love and was loved again; had a present and a future once more, not only her own full past; and she must finish with Edward in half an hour, for Jimmy was coming. She sat down on the divan, took his hand in a sisterly way, and said:

"Tell me, Edward; I can see you're in trouble. What is it?"

"Noel. The boy she was fond of has been killed."

She dropped his hand.

"Oh, no! Poor child! It's too true!" Tears started up in her grey eyes, and she touched them with a tiny handkerchief. "Poor, poor little Noel! Was she very fond of him?"

"A very sudden, short engagement; but I'm afraid she takes it desperately to heart. I don't know how to comfort her; only a woman could. I came to ask you: Do you think she ought to go on with her work? What do you think, Leila? I feel lost!"

Leila, gazing at him, thought: 'Lost? Yes, you look lost, my poor Edward!'

"I should let her go on," she said: "it helps; it's the only thing that does help. I'll see if I can get them to let her come into the wards. She ought to be in touch with suffering and the men; that kitchen work will try her awfully just now. Was he very young?"

"Yes. They wanted to get married. I was opposed to it."

Leila's lips curled ever so little. 'You would be!' she thought.

"I couldn't bear to think of Nollie giving herself hastily, like that; they had not known each other three weeks. It was very hard for me, Leila. And then suddenly he was sent to the front."

Resentment welled up in Leila. The kill-joys! As if life didn't kill joy fast enough! Her cousin's face at that moment was almost abhorrent to her, its gentle perplexed goodness darkened and warped by that monkish look. She turned away, glanced at the clock over the hearth, and thought: 'Yes, and he

would stop Jimmy and me! He would say: "Oh, no! dear Leila—you mustn't love—it's sin!" How I hate that word!'

"I think the most dreadful thing in life," she said abruptly, "is the way people suppress their natural instincts; what they suppress in themselves they make other people suppress too, if they can; and that's the cause of half the misery in this world."

Then at the surprise on his face at this little outburst, whose cause he could not know, she added hastily: "I hope Noel will get over it quickly, and find someone else."

"Yes. If they had been married—how much worse it would have been. Thank God, they weren't!"

"I don't know. They would have had an hour of bliss. Even an hour of bliss is worth something in these days."

"To those who only believe in this life—perhaps."

'Ten minutes more!' she thought: 'Oh, why doesn't he go?' But at that very moment he got up, and instantly her heart went out to him again.

"I'm so sorry, Edward. If I can help in any way—I'll try my best with Noel to-morrow; and do come to me whenever you feel inclined."

She took his hand in hers; afraid that he would sit down again, she yet could not help a soft glance into his eyes, and a little rush of pitying warmth in the pressure of her hand.

Pierson smiled; the smile which always made her sorry for him.

"Good-bye, Leila; you're very good and kind to me. Good-bye."

Her bosom swelled with relief and compassion; and—she let him out.

Running upstairs again she thought: 'I've just time. What shall I put on? Poor Edward, poor Noel! What colour does Jimmy like? Oh! Why didn't I keep him those ten years ago —what utter waste!' And, feverishly adorning herself, she came back to the window, and stood there in the dark to watch, while some jasmine which grew below sent up its scent to her. 'Would I marry him?' she thought, 'if he asked me? But he won't ask me—why should he now? Besides, I couldn't bear him to feel I wanted position or money from him. I only want love—love—love!' The silent repetition of that word gave her a wonderful sense of solidity and comfort. So long as she only wanted love, surely he would give it.

A tall figure turned down past the church, coming towards her.

It was he! And suddenly she bethought herself. She went to the little black piano, sat down, and began to sing the song she had sung to him ten years ago: "If I could be the falling dew and fall on thee all day!" She did not even look round when he came in, but continued to croon out the words, conscious of him just behind her shoulder in the dark. But when she had finished, she got up and threw her arms round him, strained him to her, and burst into tears on his shoulder; thinking of Noel and that dead boy, thinking of the millions of other boys, thinking of her own happiness, thinking of those ten years wasted, of how short was life, and love; thinking—hardly knowing what she thought! And Jimmy Fort, very moved by this emotion which he only half understood, pressed her tightly in his arms, and kissed her wet cheeks and her neck, pale and warm in the darkness.

V

1 §

Noel went on with her work for a month, and then, one morning, fainted over a pile of dishes. The noise attracted attention, and Mrs. Lynch was summoned.

The sight of her lying there so deadly white taxed Leila's nerves severely. But the girl revived quickly, and a cab was sent for. Leila went with her, and told the driver to stop at Camelot Mansions. Why take her home in this state, why not save the jolting, and let her recover properly? They went upstairs arm in arm. Leila made her lie down on the divan, and put a hot-water bottle to her feet. Noel was still so passive and pale that even to speak to her seemed a cruelty. And, going to her little sideboard, Leila stealthily extracted a pint bottle of some champagne which Jimmy Fort had sent in, and took it with two glasses and a corkscrew into her bedroom. She drank a little herself, and came out bearing a glass to the girl. Noel shook her head, and her eyes seemed to say: "Do you really think I'm so easily mended?" But Leila had been through too much in her time to despise earthly remedies, and she held it to the girl's lips until she drank. It was excellent champagne, and, since Noel had never yet touched alcohol, had an instantaneous effect. Her eyes brightened; little red spots came up in her cheeks. And suddenly she rolled over and buried her face deep in a cushion. With her short hair, she looked so like a child lying there, and Leila knelt down, stroking her head, and saying: "There, there; my love! There, there!"

At last the girl raised herself; now that the pallid, mask-like despair of the last month was broken, she seemed on fire, and her face had a wild look. She withdrew herself from Leila's touch, and, crossing her arms tightly across her chest, said:

"I can't bear it; I can't sleep. I want him back; I hate life—I hate the world. We hadn't done anything—only just loved each other. God *likes* punishing; just because we loved each other; we had only one day to love each other—only one day—only one!"

Leila could see the long white throat above those rigid arms

straining and swallowing; it gave her a choky feeling to watch it. The voice, uncannily dainty for all the wildness of the words and face, went on:

"I won't—I don't want to live. If there's another life, I shall go to him. And if there isn't—it's just sleep."

Leila put out her hand to ward off these wild wanderings. Like most women who live simply the life of their senses and emotions, she was orthodox, or rather never speculated on such things.

"Tell me about yourself and him," she said.

Noel fastened her great eyes on her cousin. "We loved each other; and children are born, aren't they, after you've loved? But mine won't be!" From the look on her face rather than from her words, the full reality of her meaning came to Leila, vanished, came again. Nonsense! But—what an awful thing, if true! That which had always seemed to her such an exaggerated occurrence in the common walks of life—why! now, it was a tragedy! Instinctively she raised herself and put her arms round the girl.

"My poor dear!" she said; "you're fancying things!"

The colour had faded out of Noel's face, and, with her head thrown back and her eyelids half-closed, she looked like a scornful young ghost.

"If it is—I shan't live. I don't mean to—it's easy to die. I don't mean Daddy to know."

"Oh! my dear, my dear!" was all Leila could stammer.

"Was it wrong, Leila?"

"Wrong? I don't know—wrong? If it really is so—it was—unfortunate. But surely, surely—you're mistaken?"

Noel shook her head. "I did it so that we should belong to each other. Nothing could have taken him from me."

Leila caught at the girl's words.

"Then, my dear—he hasn't quite gone from you, you see?"

Noel's lips formed a "No" which was inaudible. "But Daddy!" she whispered.

Edward's face came before Leila so vividly that she could hardly see the girl for the tortured shape of it. Then the hedonist in her revolted against that ascetic vision. Her worldly judgment condemned and deplored this calamity, her instinct could not help applauding that hour of life and love, snatched out of the jaws of death. "Need he ever know?" she said.

"I could never lie to Daddy. But it doesn't matter. Why should one go on living, when life is rotten?"

Outside the sun was shining brightly, though it was late October. Leila got up from her knees. She stood at the window thinking hard.

"My dear," she said at last, "you mustn't get morbid. Look at me! I've had two husbands, and—and—well, a pretty stormy up and down time of it; and I dare say I've got lots of trouble before me. But I'm not going to cave in. Nor must you. The Piersons have plenty of pluck; you mustn't be a traitor to your blood. That's the last thing. Your boy would have told you to stick it. These are your 'trenches,' and you're not going to be downed, are you?"

After she had spoken there was a long silence, before Noel said:

"Give me a cigarette, Leila."

Leila produced the little flat case she carried.

"That's brave," she said. "Nothing's incurable at your age. Only one thing's incurable—getting old."

Noel laughed. "That's curable too, isn't it?"

"Not without surrender."

Again there was a silence, while the blue fume from two cigarettes fast-smoked, rose towards the low ceiling. Then Noel got up from the divan, and went over to the piano. She was still in her hospital dress of lilac-coloured linen, and while she stood there touching the keys, playing a chord now and then, Leila's heart felt hollow from compassion; she was so happy herself just now, and this child so very wretched!

"Play to me," she said; "no—don't; I'll play to you." And sitting down, she began to play and sing a little French song, whose first line ran: "*Si on est jolie, jolie comme vous.*" It was soft, gay, charming. If the girl cried, so much the better. But Noel did not cry. She seemed suddenly to have recovered all her self-possession. She spoke calmly, answered Leila's questions without emotion, and said she would go home. Leila went out with her, and walked some way in the direction of her home; distressed, but frankly at a loss. At the bottom of Portland Place Noel stopped and said: "I'm quite all right now, Leila; thank you awfully. I shall just go home and lie down. And I shall come to-morrow, the same as usual. Good-bye!" Leila could only grasp the girl's hand, and say: "My dear, that's splendid. There's many a slip—besides, it's war-time."

With that saying, enigmatic even to herself, she watched the girl moving slowly away; and turned back herself towards her hospital, with a disturbed and compassionate heart.

2 §

But Noel did not go east; she walked down Regent Street. She had received a certain measure of comfort, been steadied by her experienced cousin's vitality, and the new thoughts suggested by those words: "He hasn't quite gone from you, has he?" "Besides, it's war-time." Leila had spoken freely, too, and the physical ignorance in which the girl had been groping these last weeks was now removed. Like most proud natures, she did not naturally think much about the opinion of other people; besides, she knew nothing of the world, its feelings and judgments. Her nightmare was the thought of her father's horror and grief. She tried to lessen that nightmare by remembering his opposition to her marriage, and the resentment she had felt. He had never realised, never understood, how she and Cyril loved. Now, if she were really going to have a child, it would be Cyril's—Cyril's son—Cyril over again. The instinct stronger than reason, refinement, tradition, upbringing, which had pushed her on in such haste to make sure of union—the irrepressible pulse of life faced with annihilation—seemed to revive within her, and make her terrible secret almost precious. She had read about "War babies" in the papers, read with a dull curiosity; but now the atmosphere, as it were, of those writings was illumined for her. These babies were wrong, were a "problem," and yet, behind all that, she seemed now to know that people were glad of them; they made up, they filled the gaps. Perhaps, when she had one, she would be proud, secretly proud, in spite of everyone, in spite of her father! They had tried to kill Cyril—God and everyone; but they hadn't been able, he was alive within her! A glow came into her face, walking among the busy shopping crowd, and people turned to look at her; she had that appearance of seeing no one, nothing, which is strange and attractive to those who have a moment to spare from contemplation of their own affairs. Fully two hours she wandered thus, before going in, and only lost that exalted feeling when, in her own little room, she had taken up his photograph, and was sitting on her bed gazing at it. She had a bad breakdown then. Locked in there, she lay on her bed, crying,

dreadfully lonely, till she fell asleep exhausted, with the tear-stained photograph clutched in her twitching fingers. She woke with a start. It was dark, and someone was knocking on her door.

"Miss Noel!"

Childish perversity kept her silent. Why couldn't they leave her alone? They would leave her alone if they knew. Then she heard another kind of knocking, and her father's voice:

"Nollie! Nollie!"

She scrambled up, and opened. He looked scared, and her heart smote her.

"It's all right, Daddy; I was asleep."

"My dear, I'm sorry, but dinner's ready."

"I don't want any dinner; I think I'll go to bed."

The frown between his brows deepened.

"You shouldn't lock your door, Nollie. I was quite frightened. I went round to the hospital to bring you home, and they told me about your fainting. I want you to see a doctor."

Noel shook her head vigorously. "Oh, no! It's nothing!"

"Nothing? To faint like that? Come, my child. To please me." He took her face in his hands. Noel shrank away.

"No, Daddy. I won't see a doctor. Extravagance in war-time! I won't. It's no good trying to make me. I'll come down if you like; I shall be all right to-morrow."

With this Pierson had to be content; but, often that evening, she saw him looking at her anxiously. And when she went up, he came out of his study, followed to her room, and insisted on lighting her fire. Kissing her at the door, he said very quietly:

"I wish I could be a mother to you, my child!"

For a moment it flashed through Noel: 'He knows!' then, by the puzzled look on his face, she knew that he did not. If only he did know; what a weight it would be off her mind! But she answered quietly too: "Good night, Daddy dear!" kissed him, and shut the door.

She sat down before the little new fire, and spread her hands out to it; all was so cold and wintry in her heart. And the firelight flickered on her face, where shadows lay thick under her eyes, for all the roundness of her cheeks, and on her slim pale hands, and the supple grace of her young body. And out in the night, clouds raced over the moon, which had come full once more.

VI

1 §

Pierson went back to his study, and wrote to Gratian.

"If you can get leave for a few days, my dear, I want you at home. I am troubled about Nollie. Ever since that disaster happened to her she has been getting paler; and to-day she fainted. She won't see a doctor, but perhaps you could get her to see George. If you come up, he will surely be able to run up to us for a day or two. If not, you must take her down to him at the sea. I have just seen the news of your second cousin Charlie Pierson's death; he was killed in one of the last attacks on the Somme; he was nephew of my cousin Leila whom, as you know, Noel sees every day at her hospital. Bertram has the D. S. O. I have been less hard-pressed lately; Lauder has been home on leave and has taken some Services for me. And now the colder weather has come, I am feeling much fresher. Try your best to come. I am seriously concerned for our beloved child.

"Your affectionate father,
"Edward Pierson."

Gratian answered that she could get week-end leave, and would come on Friday. He met her at the station, and they drove thence straight to the hospital, to pick up Noel. Leila came to them in the waiting-room, and Pierson, thinking they would talk more freely about Noel's health if he left them alone, went into the recreation room, and stood watching a game of bagatelle between two convalescents. When he returned to the little sitting-room they were still standing by the hearth, talking in low voices. Gratian must surely have been stooping over the fire, for her face was red, almost swollen, and her eyes looked as if she had scorched them.

Leila said lightly:

"Well, Edward, aren't the men delightful? When are we going to another concert together?"

She, too, was flushed and looking almost young.

"Ah! If we could do the things we want to."

"That's very pretty, Edward; but you should, you know—for a tonic." He shook his head and smiled.

"You're a temptress, Leila. Will you let Nollie know, please, that we can take her back with us? Can you let her off to-morrow?"

"For as long as you like; she wants a rest. I've been talking to Gratian. We oughtn't to have let her go on after a shock like that—my fault, I'm afraid. I thought that work might be best."

Pierson was conscious of Gratian walking past him out of the room. He held out his hand to Leila, and followed. A small noise occurred behind him such as a woman makes when she has put a foot through her own skirt, or has other powerful cause for dismay. Then he saw Noel in the hall, and was vaguely aware of being the centre of a triangle of women whose eyes were playing catch-glance. His daughters kissed each other; and he became seated between them in the taxi. The most unobservant of men, he parted from them in the hall without having perceived anything except that they were rather silent; and, going to his study, he took up a Life of Sir Thomas More. There was a passage therein which he itched to show George Laird, who was coming up that evening.

Gratian and Noel had mounted the stairs with lips tight set, and eyes averted; both were very pale. When they reached the door of Gratian's room—the room which had been their mother's—Noel was for passing on, but Gratian caught her by the arm, and said: "Come in." The fire was burning brightly in there, and the two sisters stood in front of it, one on each side, their hands clutching the mantelshelf, staring at the flames. At last Noel put one hand in front of her eyes, and said:

"I asked her to tell you."

Gratian made the movement of one who is gripped by two strong emotions, and longs to surrender to one or to the other.

"It's too horrible," was all she said.

Noel turned towards the door.

"Stop, Nollie!"

Noel stopped with her hand on the door knob. "I don't want to be forgiven and sympathised with. I just want to be let alone."

"How can you be let alone?"

The tide of misery surged up in Noel, and she cried out pas-

sionately: "I hate sympathy from people who can't understand. I don't want anyone's. I can always go away, and lose myself."

The words "can't understand" gave Gratian a shock.

"I *can* understand," she said.

"You can't; you never saw him. You never saw——" her lips quivered so that she had to stop and bite them, to keep back a rush ot tears. "Besides you would never have done it yourself."

Gratian went towards her, but stopped, and sat down on the bed. It was true. She would never have done it herself; it was just that which, for all her longing to help her sister, iced her love and sympathy. How terrible, wretched, humiliating! Her own sister, her only sister, in the position of all those poor, badly brought up girls, who forgot themselves! And her father —their father! Till that moment she had hardly thought of him, too preoccupied by the shock to her own pride. The word: "Dad!" was forced from her.

Noel shuddered.

"That boy!" said Gratian suddenly; "I can't forgive *him*. If you didn't know—*he* did. It was—it was——" She stopped at the sight of Noel's face.

"I *did* know," she said. "It was I. He was my husband, as much as yours is. If you say a word against him, I'll never speak to you again. I'm glad, and you would be, if you were going to have one. What's the difference, except that you've had luck, and I—haven't." Her lips quivered again, and she was silent.

Gratian stared up at her. She had a longing for George—to know what he thought and felt.

"Do you mind if I tell George?" she said.

Noel shook her head. "No; not now. Tell anybody." And suddenly the misery behind the mask of her face went straight to Gratian's heart. She got up and put her arms round her sister.

"Nollie dear, don't look like that!"

Noel suffered the embrace without response, but when it was over, went to her own room.

Gratian stayed, sorry, sore and vexed, uncertain, anxious. Her pride was deeply wounded, her heart torn; she was angry with herself. Why couldn't she have been more sympathetic? And yet, now that Noel was no longer there, she again condemned the dead. What he had done was unpardonable. Nollie

was such a child! He had committed sacrilege. If only George would come, and she could talk it all out with him! She, who had married for love and known passion, had insight enough to feel that Noel's love had been deep—so far as anything, of course, could be deep in such a child. Gratian was at the mature age of twenty. But to have forgotten herself like that! And this boy! If she had known him, that feeling might have been mitigated by the personal element, so important to all human judgment; but never having seen him, she thought of his conduct as "caddish." And she knew that this was, and would be, the trouble between her and her sister. However she might disguise it, Noel would feel that judgment underneath.

She stripped off her nurse's garb, put on an evening frock, and fidgeted about the room. Anything rather than go down and see her father again before she must. This, which had happened, was beyond words terrible for him; she dreaded the talk with him about Noel's health which would have to come. She could say nothing, of course, until Noel wished; and, very truthful by nature, the idea of having to act a lie distressed her.

She went down at last, and found them both in the drawing-room already; Noel in a frilly evening frock, sitting by the fire with her chin on her hand, while her father was reading out the war news from the evening paper. At sight of that cool, dainty, girlish figure brooding over the fire, and of her father's worn face, the tragedy of this business thrust itself on her with redoubled force. Poor Dad! Poor Nollie! Awful! Then Noel turned, and gave a little shake of her head, and her eyes said, almost as plainly as lips could have said it: 'Silence!' Gratian nodded, and came forward to the fire. And so began one of those calm, domestic evenings, which cover sometimes such depths of heartache.

2 §

Noel stayed up until her father went to bed, then went upstairs at once. She had evidently determined that they should not talk about her. Gratian sat on alone, waiting for her husband! It was nearly midnight when he came, and she did not tell him the family news till next morning. He received it with a curious little grunt. Gratian saw his eyes contract, as they might have, perhaps, looking at some bad and complicated wound, and then stare steadily at the ceiling. Though they had been married over a year, she did not yet know what he thought about

many things, and she waited with a queer sinking at her heart. This skeleton in the family cupboard was a test of his affection for herself, a test of the quality of the man she had married. He did not speak for a little, and her anxiety grew. Then his hand sought hers, and gave it a hard squeeze.

"Poor little Nollie! This is a case for Mark Tapleyism. But cheer up, Gracie! We'll get her through somehow."

"But father! It's impossible to keep it from him, and impossible to tell him! Oh George! I never knew what family pride was till now. It's incredible. That wretched boy!"

"'*De mortuis.*' Come, Gracie! In the midst of death we are in life! Nollie was a plumb little idiot. But it's the war—the war! Your father must get used to it; it's a rare chance for his Christianity."

"Dad will be as sweet as anything—that's what makes it so horrible!"

George Laird redoubled his squeeze. "Quite right! The old-fashioned father could let himself go. But need he know? We can get her away from London, and later on, we must manage somehow. If he does hear, we must make him feel that Nollie was 'doing her bit.'"

Gratian withdrew her hand. "Don't!" she said in a muffled voice.

George Laird turned and looked at her. He was greatly upset himself, realising perhaps more truly than his young wife the violence of this disaster; he was quite capable, too, of feeling how deeply she was stirred and hurt; but, a born pragmatist, confronting life always in the experimental spirit, he was impatient of the: "How awful!" attitude. And this streak of her father's ascetic traditionalism in Gratian always roused in him a wish to break it up. If she had not been his wife he would have admitted at once that he might just as well try and alter the bone-formation of her head, as break down such a fundamental trait of character, but, being his wife, he naturally considered alteration as possible as putting a new staircase in a house, or throwing two rooms into one. And, taking her in his arms, he said: "I know; but it'll all come right, if we put a good face on it. Shall I talk to Nollie?"

Gratian assented, from the desire to be able to say to her father: "George is seeing her!" and so stay the need for a discussion. But the whole thing seemed to her more and more a calamity which nothing could lessen or smooth away.

George Laird had plenty of cool courage, invaluable in men who have to inflict as well as to alleviate pain, but he did not like his mission "a little bit" as he would have said; and he proposed a walk because he dreaded a scene. Noel accepted for the same reason. She liked George, and with the disinterested detachment of a sister-in-law, and the shrewdness of extreme youth, knew him perhaps better than did his wife. She was sure, at all events, of being neither condemned nor sympathised with.

They might have gone, of course, in any direction, but chose to make for the City. Such deep decisions are subconscious. They sought, no doubt, a dry, unemotional region; or perhaps one where George, who was in uniform, might rest his arm from the automatic-toy game which the military play. They had reached Cheapside before he was conscious to the full of the bizarre nature of this walk with his pretty young sister-in-law among all the bustling, black-coated mob of money-makers. 'I wish the devil we hadn't come out!' he thought; 'it would have been easier indoors, after all.'

He cleared his throat, however, and squeezing her arm gently, began: "Gratian's told me, Nollie. The great thing is to keep your spirit up, and not worry."

"I suppose you couldn't cure me."

The words, in that delicate spurning voice, absolutely staggered George; but he said quickly:

"Out of the question, Nollie; impossible! What are you thinking of?"

"Daddy."

The words: "D——n Daddy!" rose to his teeth; but he bit them off, and said: "Bless him! We shall have to see to all that. Do you really want to keep it from him? It must be one way or the other; no use concealing it, if it's to come out later."

"No."

He stole a look at her. She was gazing straight before her. How damnably young she was, how pretty! A lump came up in his throat.

"I shouldn't do anything yet," he said, "too early. Later on, if you'd like me to tell him. But that's entirely up to you, my dear; he need never know."

"No."

He could not follow her thought. Then she said:

"Gratian condemns Cyril. Don't let her. I won't have him

badly thought of. It was my doing. I wanted to make sure of him."

George answered stoutly:

"Gracie's upset, of course, but she'll soon be all right. You mustn't let it come between you. The thing you've got to keep steadily before you is that life's a huge, wide, adaptable thing. Look at all these people! There's hardly one of them who hasn't got now, or hasn't had, some personal difficulty or trouble before them as big as yours almost; bigger perhaps. And here they are as lively as fleas. That's what makes the fascination of life—the jolly irony of it all. It would do you good to have a turn in France, and see yourself in proportion to the whole." He felt her fingers suddenly slip under his arm, and went on with greater confidence.

"*Life's* going to be the important thing in the future, Nollie; not comfort and cloistered virtue and security; but *living,* and pressure to the square inch. Do you twig? All the old hard-and-fast traditions and drags on life are in the melting-pot. Death's boiling their bones, and they'll make excellent stock for the new soup. When you prune and dock things, the sap flows quicker. Regrets and repinings and repressions are going out of fashion; we shall have no time or use for them in the future. You're going to make life—well, that's something to be thankful for, anyway. You've kept Cyril Morland alive. And—well, you know, we've all been born; some of us properly, and some improperly, and there isn't a ha'porth of difference in the value of the article, or the trouble of bringing it into the world. The cheerier you are the better your child will be, and that's all you've got to think about. You needn't begin to trouble at all for another couple of months, at least; after that, just let us know where you'd like to go, and I'll arrange it somehow."

She looked round at him, and under that young, clear, brooding gaze he had the sudden uncomfortable feeling of having spoken like a charlatan. Had he really touched the heart of the matter? What good were his generalities to this young, fastidiously nurtured girl, brought up to tell the truth, by a father so old-fashioned and devoted, whom she loved? It was George's nature, too, to despise words; and the conditions of his life these last two years had given him a sort of horror of those who act by talking. He felt inclined to say: 'Don't pay the slightest attention to me; it's all humbug; what will be will be, and there's an end of it.'

Then she said quietly:

"Shall I tell Daddy or not?"

He wanted to say: "No," but somehow couldn't. After all, the straightforward course was probably the best. For this would have to be a lifelong concealment. It was impossible to conceal a thing for ever; sooner or later he would find out. But the doctor rose up in him, and he said:

"Don't go to meet trouble, Nollie; it'll be time enough in two months. Then tell him, or let me."

She shook her head. "No; I will, if it is to be done."

He put his hand on hers, within his arm, and gave it a squeeze.

"What shall I do till then?" she asked.

"Take a week's complete rest, and then go on where you are."

Noel was silent a minute, then said: "Yes; I will."

They spoke no more on the subject, and George exerted himself to talk about hospital experiences, and that phenomenon, the British soldier. But just before they reached home he said:

"Look here, Nollie! If you're not ashamed of yourself, no one will be ashamed of you. If you put ashes on your own head, your fellow-beings will assist you; for of such is their charity."

And, receiving another of those clear, brooding looks, he left her with the thought: 'A lonely child!'

VII

Noel went back to her hospital after a week's rest. George had done more for her than he suspected, for his saying: "Life's a huge wide adaptable thing!" had stuck in her mind. Did it matter what happened to her? And she used to look into the faces of the people she met, and wonder what was absorbing them. What secret griefs and joys were they carrying about with them? The loneliness of her own life now forced her to this speculation concerning others, for she was extraordinarily lonely; Gratian and George were back at work, her father must be kept at bay; with Leila she felt ill at ease, for the confession had hurt her pride; and family friends and acquaintances of all sorts she shunned like the plague. The only person she did not succeed in avoiding was Jimmy Fort, who came in one evening after dinner, bringing her a large bunch of hothouse violets. But then, he did not seem to matter—too new an acquaintance, too detached. Something he said made her aware that he had heard of her loss, and that the violets were a token of sympathy. He seemed awfully kind that evening, telling her "tales of Araby," and saying nothing which would shock her father. It was wonderful to be a man and roll about the world as he had, and see all life, and queer places, and people—Chinamen, and Gauchos, and Boers, and Mexicans. It gave her a kind of thirst. And she liked to watch his brown, humorous face, which seemed made of dried leather. It gave her the feeling that life and experience were all that mattered, doing and seeing things; it made her own trouble seem smaller, less important. She squeezed his hand when she said good night. "Thank you for my violets and for coming; it was awfully kind of you! I wish I could have adventures!" And he answered: "You will, my dear fairy princess!" He said it queerly and very kindly.

Fairy Princess! What a funny thing to call her! If he had only known!

There were not many adventures to be had in those regions where she washed up. Not much "wide and adaptable life" to take her thoughts off herself. But on her journeys to and from the hospital she had more than one odd little experience. One morning she noticed a poorly dressed woman with a red and

swollen face, flapping along Regent Street like a wounded bird, and biting strangely at her hand. Hearing her groan, Noel asked her what the matter was. The woman held out the hand. "Oh!" she moaned, "I was scrubbin' the floor and I got this great needle stuck through my 'and, and it's broke off, and I can't get it out. Oh! Oh!" She bit at the needle-end, not quite visible, but almost within reach of teeth, and suddenly went very white. In dismay, Noel put an arm round her, and turned her into a fine chemist's shop. Several ladies were in there, buying perfumes, and they looked with acerbity at this disordered dirty female entering among them. Noel went up to a man behind the counter. "Please give me something quick, for this poor woman, I think she's going to faint. She's run a needle through her hand, and can't get it out." The man gave her "something quick," and Noel pushed past two of the dames back to where the woman was sitting. She was still obstinately biting at her hand, and suddenly her chin flew up, and there, between her teeth, was the needle. She took it from them with her other hand, stuck it proudly in the front of her dress, and out tumbled the words: "Oh! there—I've got it!"

When she had swallowed the draught, she looked round her, bewildered, and said:

"Thank you kindly, miss!" and shuffled out. Noel paid for the draught, and followed; and, behind her, the shining shop seemed to exhale a perfumed breath of relief.

"You can't go back to work," she said to the woman. "Where do you live?"

"'Ornsey, miss."

"You must take a 'bus and go straight home, and put your hand at once into weak Condy's fluid and water. It's swelling. Here's five shillings."

"Yes, miss; thank you, miss, I'm sure. It's very kind of you. It does ache cruel."

"If it's not better this afternoon, you must go to a doctor. Promise!"

"Oh, dear, yes. 'Ere's my 'bus. Thank you kindly, miss."

Noel saw her borne away, still sucking at her dirty swollen hand. She walked on in a glow of love for the poor woman, and hate for the ladies in the chemist's shop, and forgot her own trouble till she had almost reached the hospital.

Another November day, a Saturday, leaving early, she walked to Hyde Park. The plane-trees were just at the height of their

spotted beauty. Few—very few—yellow leaves still hung; and the slender pretty trees seemed rejoicing in their freedom from summer foliage. All their delicate boughs and twigs were shaking and dancing in the wind; and their rain-washed leopard-like bodies had a lithe un-English gaiety. Noel passed down their line, and seated herself on a bench. Close by, an artist was painting. His easel was only some three yards away from her, and she could see the picture; a vista of the Park Lane houses through the gay plane-tree screen. He was a tall man, about forty, evidently foreign, with a thin, long, oval beardless face, high brow, large grey eyes which looked as if he suffered from headaches and lived much within himself. He cast many glances at her, and, pursuant of her new interest in "life" she watched him discreetly; a little startled however, when, taking off his broad-brimmed squash hat, he said in a broken accent:

"Forgive me the liberty I take, mademoiselle, but would you so very kindly allow me to make a sketch of you sitting there? I work very quick. I beg you will let me. I am Belgian, and have no manners, you see." And he smiled.

"If you like," said Noel.

"I thank you very much."

He shifted his easel, and began to draw. She felt flattered, and a little fluttered. He was so pale, and had a curious, half-fed look, which moved her.

"Have you been long in England?" she said presently.

"Ever since the first months of the war."

"Do you like it?"

"I was very homesick at first. But I live in my pictures; there are wonderful things in London."

"Why did you want to sketch me?"

The painter smiled again. "Mademoiselle, youth is so mysterious. Those young trees I have been painting mean so much more than the old big trees. Your eyes are seeing things that have not yet happened. There is Fate in them, and a look of defending us others from seeing it. We have not such faces in my country; we are simpler; we do not defend our expressions. The English are very mysterious. We are like children to them. Yet in some ways you are like children to us. You are not people of the world at all. You English have been good to us, but you do not like us."

"And I suppose you do not like us, either?"

He smiled again, and she noticed how white his teeth were.

"Well, not very much. The English do things from duty, but their hearts they keep to themselves. And their Art—well, that is really amusing!"

"I don't know much about Art," Noel murmured.

"It is the world to me," said the painter, and was silent, drawing with increased pace and passion.

"It is so difficult to get subjects," he remarked abruptly. "I cannot afford to pay models, and they are not fond of me painting out of doors. If I had always a subject like you! You—you have a grief, have you not?"

At that startling little question, Noel looked up, frowning.

"Everybody has, now."

The painter grasped his chin; his eyes had suddenly become tragical.

"Yes," he said, "everybody. Tragedy is daily bread. I have lost my family; they are in Belgium. How they live I do not know."

"I'm sorry; very sorry, too, if we aren't nice to you, here. We ought to be."

He shrugged his shoulders. "What would you have? We are different. That is unpardonable. An artist is always lonely, too; he has a skin fewer than other people, and he sees things that they do not. People do not like you to be different. If ever in your life you act differently from others, you will find it so, mademoiselle."

Noel felt herself flushing. Was he reading her secret? His eyes had such a peculiar, second-sighted look.

"Have you nearly finished?" she asked.

"No, mademoiselle; I could go on for hours; but I do not wish to keep you. It is cold for you, sitting there."

Noel got up. "May I look?"

"Certainly."

She did not quite recognise herself—who does?—but she saw a face which affected her oddly, of a girl looking at something which was, and yet was not, in front of her.

"My name is Lavendie," the painter said; "my wife and I live here," and he gave her a card.

Noel could not help answering: "My name is Noel Pierson; I live with my father; here's the address"—she found her case, and fished out a card. "My father is a clergyman; would you care to come and see him? He loves music and painting."

"It would be a great pleasure; and perhaps I might be allowed to paint you. Alas! I have no studio."

Noel drew back. "I'm afraid that I work in a hospital all day, and—and I don't want to be painted, thank you. But, Daddy would like to meet you, I'm sure."

The painter bowed again; she saw that he was hurt.

"Of course I can see that you're a very fine painter," she said quickly; "only—only—I don't *want* to, you see. Perhaps you'd like to paint Daddy; he's got a most interesting face."

The painter smiled. "He is your father, mademoiselle? May I ask you one question? Why do you not want to be painted?"

"Because—because I *don't,* I'm afraid." She held out her hand. The painter bowed over it. "*Au revoir, mademoiselle.*"

"Thank you," said Noel; "it was awfully interesting." And she walked away. The sky had become full of clouds round the westerly sun; and the foreign crinkled tracery of the plane-tree branches against that French-gray, golden-edged mass, was very lovely. Beauty, and the troubles of others, soothed her. She felt sorry for the painter, but his eyes saw too much! And his words: "If ever you act differently from others," made her feel him uncanny. Was it true that people always disliked and condemned those who acted differently? If her old schoolfellows now knew what was before her, how would they treat her? In her father's study hung a little reproduction of a tiny picture in the Louvre, a "Rape of Europa," by an unknown painter—a humorous delicate thing, of an enraptured, fair-haired girl mounted on a prancing white bull, crossing a shallow stream, while on the bank all her white girl-companions were gathered, turning half-sour, half-envious faces away from that too-fearful spectacle, while one of them tried with timid desperation to mount astride of a sitting cow, and follow. The face of the girl on the bull had once been compared by someone with her own. She thought of this picture now, and saw her school fellows—a throng of shocked and wondering girls. Suppose one of them had been in her position! 'Should I have been turning my face away, like the rest? I wouldn't—no, I wouldn't,' she thought; 'I should have understood!' But she knew there was a kind of false emphasis in her thought. Instinctively she felt the painter right. One who acted differently from others, was lost.

She told her father of the encounter, adding:

"I expect he'll come, Daddy."

Pierson answered dreamily: "Poor fellow, I shall be glad to see him if he does."

"And you'll sit to him, won't you?"

"My dear—I?"

"He's lonely, you know, and people aren't nice to him. Isn't it hateful that people should hurt others, because they're foreign or different?"

She saw his eyes open with mild surprise, and went on: "I know you think people are charitable, Daddy, but they aren't, of course."

"*That's* not exactly charitable, Nollie."

"You know they're not. I think sin often just means doing things differently. It's not real sin when it only hurts yourself; but that doesn't prevent people condemning you, does it?"

"I don't know what you mean, Nollie."

Noel bit her lips, and murmured: "Are you sure we're really Christians, Daddy?"

The question was so startling, from his own daughter, that Pierson took refuge in an attempt at wit. "I should like notice of that question, Nollie, as they say in Parliament."

"That means you don't."

Pierson flushed. "We're fallible enough; but, don't get such ideas into your head, my child. There's a lot of rebellious talk and writing in these days."

Noel clasped her hands behind her head. "I think," she said, looking straight before her, and speaking to the air, "that Christianity is what you do, not what you think or say. And I don't believe people can be Christians when they act like others—I mean, when they join together to judge and hurt people."

Pierson rose and paced the room. "You have not seen enough of life to talk like that," he said. But Noel went on:

"One of the men in her hospital told Gratian about the treatment of conscientious objectors—it was horrible. Why do they treat them like that, just because they disagree? Captain Fort says it's fear which makes people bullies. But how can it be fear when they're hundreds to one? He says man has domesticated his animals but has never succeeded in domesticating himself. Man *must* be a wild beast, you know, or the world couldn't be so awfully brutal. I don't see much difference between being brutal for good reasons, and being brutal for bad ones."

Pierson looked down at her with a troubled smile. There was something fantastic to him in this sudden philosophising by one

whom he had watched grow up from a tiny thing. Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings—sometimes! But then the young generation was always something of a sealed book to him; his sensitive shyness, and, still more, his cloth, placed a sort of invisible barrier between him and the hearts of others, especially the young. There were so many things of which he was compelled to disapprove, or which at least he couldn't discuss. And they knew it too well. Until these last few months he had never realised that his own daughters had remained as undiscovered by him as the interior of Brazil. And now that he perceived this, he was bewildered, yet could not imagine how to get on terms with them.

And he stood looking at Noel, intensely puzzled, suspecting nothing of the hard fact which was altering her—vaguely jealous, anxious, pained. And when she had gone up to bed, he roamed up and down the room a long time, thinking. He longed for a friend to confide in, and consult; but he knew no one. He shrank from them all, as too downright, bluff, and active; too worldly and unæsthetic; or too stiff and narrow. Amongst the younger men in his profession he was often aware of faces which attracted him, but one could not confide deep personal questions to men half one's age. But of his own generation, or his elders, he knew not one to whom he could have gone.

VIII

1 §

Leila was deep in her new draught of life. When she fell in love it had always been over head and ears, and so far her passion had always burnt itself out before that of her partner. This had been, of course, a great advantage to her. Not that Leila had ever expected her passions to burn themselves out. When she fell in love she had always thought it was for always. This time she was sure it was, surer that she had ever been. Jimmy Fort seemed to her the man she had been looking for all her life. He was not so good-looking as either Fane or Lynch, but beside him these others seemed to her now almost ridiculous. Indeed they did not figure at all, they shrank, they withered, they were husks, together with the others for whom she had known passing weaknesses. There was only one man in the world for her now, and would be for evermore. She did not idealise him either, it was more serious than that; she was thrilled by his voice, and his touch, she dreamed of him, longed for him when he was not with her. She worried, too, for she was perfectly aware that he was not half as fond of her as she was of him. Such a new experience puzzled her, kept her instincts painfully on the alert. It was perhaps just this uncertainty about his affection which made him see more precious than any of the others. But there was ever the other reason, too—consciousness that Time was after her, and this her last grand passion. She watched him as a mother-cat watches her kitten, without seeming to, of course, for she had much experience. She had begun to have a curious secret jealousy of Noel! though why—she could not have said. It was perhaps merely incidental to her age, or sprang from that vague resemblance between her and one who outrivalled even what she had been as a girl; or from the occasional allusions Fort made to what he called "that little fairy princess." Something intangible, instinctive, gave her that jealousy. Until the death of her young cousin's lover she had felt safe, for she knew that Jimmy Fort would not hanker after another man's property; had he not proved that in old days, with herself, by running away from her? And she had often regretted having told him of Cyril

Morland's death. One day she determined to repair that error. It was at the Zoo, where they often went on Sunday afternoons. They were standing before a creature called the meercat, which reminded them both of old days on the veldt. Without turning her head she said, as if to the little animal: "Do you know that your fairy princess, as you call her, is going to have what is known as a war-baby?"

The sound of his "What!" gave her quite a stab. It was so utterly horrified.

She said stubbornly: "She came and told me all about it. The boy is dead, as you know. Yes, terrible, isn't it?" And she looked at him. His face was almost comic, so wrinkled up with incredulity.

"That lovely child! But it's impossible!"

"The impossible is sometimes true, Jimmy."

"I refuse to believe it."

"I tell you it *is* so," she said angrily.

"What a ghastly shame!"

"It was her own doing; she said so, herself."

"And her father—the padre! My God!"

Leila was suddenly smitten with a horrible doubt. She had thought it would disgust him, cure him of any little tendency to romanticise that child; and now she perceived that it was rousing in him, instead, a dangerous compassion. She could have bitten her tongue out for having spoken. When he got on the high horse of some championship, he was not to be trusted, she had found that out; was even finding it out bitterly in her own relations with him, constantly aware that half her hold on him, at least, lay in his sense of chivalry, aware that he knew her lurking dread of being flung on the beach, by age. Only ten minutes ago he had uttered a tirade before the cage of a monkey which seemed unhappy. And now she had roused that dangerous side of him in favour of Noel. What an idiot she had been!

"Don't look like that, Jimmy. I'm sorry I told you!"

His hand did not answer her pressure in the least, but he muttered:

"Well, I do think that's the limit. What's to be done for her?"

Leila answered softly: "Nothing, I'm afraid. Do you love me?" And she pressed his hand hard.

"Of course."

But Leila thought: 'If I were that meercat he'd have taken

more notice of my paw!' Her heart began suddenly to ache, and she walked on to the next cage with head up, and her mouth hard set.

2 §

Jimmy Fort walked away from Camelot Mansions that evening in extreme discomfort of mind. Leila had been so queer that he had taken leave immediately after supper. She had refused to talk about Noel; had even seemed angry when he had tried to. How extraordinary some women were! Did they think that a man could hear a thing like that about such a dainty young creature without being upset! It was the most perfectly damnable news! What on earth would she do—poor little fairy princess! Down had come her house of cards with a vengeance! The whole of her life—the whole of her life! With her bringing-up and her father and all—it seemed inconceivable that she could ever survive it. And Leila had been almost callous about the monstrous business. Women were hard to each other! Bad enough, these things, when it was a simple working girl, but this dainty, sheltered, beautiful child! No, it was altogether too strong—too painful! And following an impulse which he could not resist, he made his way to the old Square. But having reached the house, he nearly went away again. While he stood hesitating with his hand on the bell, a girl and a soldier passed, appearing as if by magic out of the moonlit November mist, blurred and solid shapes embraced, then vanished into it again, leaving the sound of footsteps. Fort jerked the bell. He was shown into what seemed, to one coming out of that mist, to be a brilliant, crowded room, though in truth there were but two lamps and five people in it. They were sitting round the fire, talking, and paused when he came in. When he had shaken hands with Pierson and been introduced to "my daughter Gratian" and a man in khaki—"my son-in-law George Laird," to a tall, thin-faced, foreign-looking man in a black stock and seemingly no collar, he went up to Noel, who had risen from a chair before the fire. 'No!' he thought, 'I've dreamed it, or Leila has lied!' She was so perfectly the self-possessed, dainty maiden he remembered. Even the feel of her hand was the same—warm and confident; and sinking into a chair, he said: "Please go on, and let me chip in."

"We were quarrelling about the Universe, Captain Fort," said the man in khaki; "delighted to have your help. I was

just saying that this particular world has no particular importance, no more than a newspaper-seller would accord to it if it were completely destroyed to-morrow—''Orrible catastrophe, total destruction of the world—six o'clock edition—pyper!' I say that it will become again the nebula out of which it was formed, and by friction with other nebula re-form into a fresh shape and so on *ad infinitum*—but I can't explain why. My wife wonders if it exists at all except in the human mind—but she can't explain what the human mind is. My father-in-law thinks that it is God's hobby—but he can't explain who or what God is. Nollie is silent. And Monsieur Lavendie hasn't yet told us what he thinks. What *do* you think, *monsieur?*" The thin-faced, big-eyed man put up his hand to his high, veined brow as if he had a headache, reddened, and began to speak in French, which Fort followed with difficulty.

"For me the Universe is a limitless artist, *monsieur*, who from all time and to all time is ever expressing himself in differing forms—always trying to make a masterpiece, and generally failing. For me this world, and all the worlds, are—like ourselves, and the flowers and trees—little separate works of art, more or less perfect, whose little lives run their course, and are spilled or powdered back into this Creative Artist, whence issue ever fresh attempts at art. I agree with Monsieur Laird, if I understand him right; but I agree also with Madame Laird, if I understand her. You see, I think mind and matter are one, or perhaps there is no such thing as either mind or matter, only growth and decay and growth again, for ever and ever; but always conscious growth—an artist expressing himself in millions of ever-changing forms; decay and death as we call them, being but rest and sleep, the ebbing of the tide, which must ever come between two rising tides, or the night which comes between two days. But the next day is never the same as the day before, nor the tide as the last tide; so the little shapes of the world and of ourselves, these works of art by the Eternal Artist, are never renewed in the same form, are never twice alike, but always fresh—fresh worlds, fresh individuals, fresh flowers, fresh everything. I do not see anything depressing in that. To me it would be depressing to think that I would go on living after death, or live again in a new body, myself yet not myself. How stale that would be! When I finish a picture it is inconceivable to me that this picture should ever become another picture, or that one can divide the expression from the mind-stuff it has

expressed. The Great Artist who is the whole of Everything, is ever in fresh effort to achieve new things. He is as a fountain who throws up new drops, no two ever alike, which fall back into the water, flow into the pipe, and so are thrown up again in fresh-shaped drops. But I cannot explain why there should be this Eternal Energy, ever expressing itself in fresh individual shapes, this Eternal Working Artist, instead of nothing at all—just empty dark for always; except indeed that it must be one thing or the other, either all or nothing, and it happens to be this, and not that, the all and not the nothing."

He stopped speaking, and his big eyes, which had fixed themselves on Fort's face, seemed to the latter not to be seeing him at all, but to rest on something beyond. The man in khaki who had risen and was standing with his hand on his wife's shoulder, said:

"Bravo, *monsieur;* jolly well put from the artist's point of view. The idea is pretty, anyway; but is there any need for an idea at all? Things are; and we have just to take them." Fort had the impression of something dark and writhing; the thin black form of his host, who had risen and come close to the fire.

"I cannot admit," he was saying, "the identity of the Creator with the created. God exists outside ourselves. Nor can I admit that there is no definite purpose and fulfilment. All is shaped to His great ends. I think we are too given to spiritual pride. The world has lost reverence; I regret it, I bitterly regret it."

"I rejoice at it," said the man in khaki. "Now, Captain Fort, your turn to bat!"

Fort, who had been looking at Noel, gave himself a shake, and said: "I think what *monsieur* calls expression, I call fighting. I suspect the Universe of being simply a long fight, a sum of conquests and defeats. Conquests leading to defeats, defeats to conquests. I want to win while I'm alive, and because I want to win, I want to live on after death. Death is a defeat. I don't want to admit it. While I have that instinct, I don't think I shall really die; when I lose it, I think I shall." He was conscious of Noel's face turning towards him, but had the feeling that she wasn't really listening. "I suspect that what we call spirit is just the fighting instinct; that what we call matter is the mood of lying down. Whether, as Mr. Pierson says, God is outside us, or, as *monsieur* thinks, we are all part of God, I don't know, I'm sure."

"Ah! There we are!" said the man in khaki. "We all speak after our temperaments, and none of us *know*. The religions of the world are just the poetic expressions of certain strongly marked temperaments. Monsieur was a poet just now, and his is the only temperament which has never yet been rammed down the world's throat in the form of religion. Go out and proclaim your views from the housetops, *monsieur,* and see what happens."

The painter shook his head with a smile which seemed to Fort very bright on the surface, and very sad underneath.

"*Non, monsieur,*" he said; "the artist does not wish to impose his temperament. Difference of temperament is the very essence of his joy, and his belief in life. Without difference there would be no life for him. '*Tout casse, tout lasse,*' but change goes on for ever. We artists reverence change, *monsieur;* we reverence the newness of each morning, of each night, of each person, of each expression of energy. Nothing is final for us; we are eager for all and always for more. We are in love, you see, even with—death."

There was a silence; then Fort heard Pierson murmur:

"That is beautiful, *monsieur;* but oh! how wrong!"

"And what do you think, Nollie?" said the man in khaki suddenly. The girl had been sitting very still in her low chair, with her hands crossed in her lap, her eyes on the fire, and the lamplight shining down on her fair hair; she looked up, startled, and her eyes met Fort's.

"I don't know; I wasn't listening." Something moved in him, a kind of burning pity, a rage of protection. He said quickly:

"These are times of action. Philosophy seems to mean nothing nowadays. The one thing is to hate tyranny and cruelty, and protect everything that's weak and lonely. It's all that's left to make life worth living, when all the packs of all the world are out for blood."

Noel was listening now, and he went on fervently: "Why! Even we who started out to fight this Prussian pack, have caught the pack feeling—so that it's hunting all over the country, on every sort of scent. It's a most infectious thing."

"I cannot see that we are being infected, Captain Fort."

"I'm afraid we are, Mr. Pierson. The great majority of people are always inclined to run with the hounds; the pressure's great just now; the pack spirit's in the air."

Pierson shook his head. "No, I cannot see it," he repeated; "it seems to me that we are all more brotherly, and more tolerant."

"Ah! *monsieur le curé,*" Fort heard the painter say very gently, "it is difficult for a good man to see the evil round him. There are those whom the world's march leaves apart, and reality cannot touch. They walk with God, and the bestialities of us animals are fantastic to them. The spirit of the pack, as *monsieur* says, is in the air. I see all human nature now, running with gaping mouths and red tongues lolling out, their breath and their cries spouting thick before them. On whom they will fall next—one never knows; the innocent with the guilty. Perhaps if you were to see some one dear to you devoured before your eyes, *monsieur le curé,* you would feel it too; and yet—I do not know."

Fort saw Noel turn her face towards her father; her expression at that moment was very strange, searching, half frightened. No! Leila had not lied, and he had not dreamed! That thing was true!

When presently he took his leave, and was out again in the Square, he could see nothing but her face and form before him in the moonlight: its soft outline, fair colouring, slender delicacy, and the brooding of the big grey eyes. He had already crossed New Oxford Street and was some way down towards the Strand, when a voice behind him murmured: *"Ah! c'est vous, monsieur!"* and the painter loomed up at his elbow.

"Are you going my way?" said Fort. "I go slowly, I'm afraid."

"The slower the better, *monsieur.* London is so beautiful in the dark. It is the despair of the painter—these moonlit nights. There are moments when one feels that reality does not exist. All is in dreams—like the face of that young lady."

Fort stared sharply round at him. "Oh! She strikes you like that, does she?"

"Ah! What a charming figure! What an atmosphere of the past and future round her! And she will not let me paint her! Well, perhaps only Mathieu Maris——" He raised his broad Bohemian hat, and ran his fingers through his hair.

"Yes," said Fort, "she'd make a wonderful picture. I'm not a judge of Art, but I can see that."

The painter smiled, and went on in his rapid French:

"She has youth and age all at once—that is rare. Her father

is an interesting man, too; I am trying to paint him; he is very difficult. He sits lost in some kind of vacancy of his own; a man whose soul has gone before him somewhere, like that of his Church, escaped from this age of machines, leaving its body behind—is it not? He is so kind; a saint, I think. The other clergymen I see passing in the street are not at all like him; they look buttoned-up and busy, with faces of men who might be schoolmasters or lawyers, or even soldiers—men of this world. Do you know this, *monsieur*—it is ironical, but it is true, I think—a man cannot be a successful priest unless he is a man of this world. I do not see any with that look of Monsieur Pierson, a little tortured within, and not quite present. He is half an artist, really a lover of music, that man. I am painting him at the piano; when he is playing his face is alive, but even then, so far away. To me, *monsieur,* he is exactly like a beautiful church which knows it is being deserted. I find him pathetic. *Je suis socialiste,* but I have always an æsthetic admiration for that old Church, which held its children by simple emotion. The times have changed; it can no longer hold them so; it stands in the dusk, with its spire to a heaven which exists no more, its bells, still beautiful but out of tune with the music of the streets. It is something of that which I wish to get into my picture of *Monsieur* Pierson; and *sapristi!* it is difficult!" Fort grunted assent. So far as he could make out the painter's words, it seemed to him a large order.

"To do it, you see," went on the painter, "one should have the proper background—these currents of modern life and modern types, passing him and leaving him untouched. There is no illusion, and no dreaming, in modern life. Look at this street. *La la!*"

In the darkened Strand, hundreds of khaki-clad figures and girls were streaming by, and all their voices had a hard, half-jovial vulgarity. The motor-cabs and 'buses pushed along remorselessly; newspaper-sellers muttered their ceaseless invitations. Again the painter made his gesture of despair: "How am I to get into my picture this modern life, which washes round him as round that church, there, standing in the middle of the street? See how the currents sweep round it, as if to wash it away; yet it stands, seeming not to see them. If I were a phantasist, it would be easy enough: but to be a phantasist is too simple for me—those romantic gentlemen bring what they like from anywhere, to serve their ends. *Moi, je suis réaliste.*

And so, *monsieur,* I have invented an idea. I am painting over his head while he sits there at the piano a picture hanging on the wall—of one of these young town girls who have no mysteriousness at all, no youth; nothing but a cheap knowledge and defiance, and good humour. He is looking up at it, but he does not see it. I will make the face of that girl the face of modern life, and he shall sit staring at it, seeing nothing. What do you think of my idea?"

But Fort had begun to feel something of the revolt which the man of action so soon experiences when he listens to an artist talking.

"It sounds all right," he said abruptly; "all the same, *monsieur,* all my sympathy is with modern life. Take these young girls, and these Tommies. For all their feather-pated vulgarity —and they are damned vulgar, I must say—they're marvellous people; they do take the rough with the smooth; they're all 'doing their bit,' you know, and facing this particularly beastly world. Æsthetically, I daresay, they're deplorable, but can you say that on the whole their philosophy isn't an advance on anything we've had up till now? They worship nothing, it's true; but they keep their ends up marvellously."

The painter, who seemed to feel the wind blowing cold on his ideas, shrugged his shoulders.

"I am not concerned with that, *monsieur;* I set down what I see; better or worse, I do not know. But look at this!" And he pointed down the darkened and moonlit street. It was all jewelled and enamelled with little spots and splashes of subdued red and green-blue light, and the downward orange glow of the high lamps—like an enchanted dream-street peopled by countless moving shapes, which only came to earth-reality when seen close to. The painter drew his breath in with a hiss.

"Ah!" he said, "what beauty! And they don't see it—not one in a thousand! Pity, isn't it? Beauty is the holy thing!"

Fort, in his turn, shrugged his shoulders. "Every man to his vision!" he said. "My leg's beginning to bother me; I'm afraid I must take a cab. Here's my address; any time you like to come. I'm often in about seven. I can't take you anywhere, I suppose?"

"A thousand thanks, *monsieur;* but I go north. I loved your words about the pack. I often wake at night and hear the howling of all the packs of the world. Those who are by nature

gentle nowadays feel they are strangers in a far land. Good night, *monsieur!*"

He took off his queer hat, bowed low, and crossed out into the Strand, like one who had come in a dream, and faded out with the waking. Fort hailed a cab, and went home, still seeing Noel's face. There was one, if you liked, waiting to be thrown to the wolves, waiting for the world's pack to begin howling round her—that lovely child; and the first, the loudest of all the pack, perhaps, must be her own father, the lean, dark figure with the gentle face, and the burnt bright eyes. What a ghastly business! His dreams that night were not such as Leila would have approved.

IX

When in the cupboard there is a real and very bony skeleton, carefully kept from the sight of a single member of the family, the position of that member is liable to become lonely. But Pierson, who had been lonely fifteen years, did not feel it so much, perhaps, as most men would have. In his dreamy nature there was a curious self-sufficiency, which only violent shocks disturbed, and he went on with his routine of duty, which had become for him as set as the pavements he trod on his way to and from it. It was not exactly true, as the painter had said, that this routine did not bring him into touch with life. After all he saw people when they were born, when they married, when they died. He helped them when they wanted money, and when they were ill; he told their children Bible stories on Sunday afternoons; he served those who were in need with soup and bread from his soup kitchen. He never spared himself in any way, and his ears were always at the service of their woes. And yet he did not understand them, and they knew that. It was as though he, or they, were colour-blind. The values were all different. He was seeing one set of objects, they another.

One street of his parish touched a main line of thoroughfare, and formed a little part of the new hunting-ground of women, who, chased forth from their usual haunts by the Authorities under pressure of the country's danger, now pursued their calling in the dark. This particular evil had always been a sort of nightmare to Pierson. The starvation which ruled his own existence inclined him to a particularly severe view and severity was not his strong point. In consequence there was ever within him a sort of very personal and poignant struggle going on beneath that seeming attitude of rigid disapproval. He joined the hunters, as it were, because he was afraid—not, of course, of his own instincts, for he was fastidious, a gentleman, and a priest, but of being lenient to a sin, to something which God abhorred. He was, as it were, bound to take a professional view of this particular offence. When in his walks abroad he passed one of these women, he would unconsciously purse his lips, and frown. The darkness of the streets seemed to lend them such power, such unholy sovereignty over the night. They were such

a danger to the soldiers, too; and in turn, the soldiers were such a danger to the lambs of his flock. Domestic disasters in his parish came to his ears from time to time; cases of young girls whose heads were turned by soldiers, so that they were about to become mothers. They seemed to him pitiful indeed; but he could not forgive them for their giddiness, for putting temptation in the way of brave young men, fighting, or about to fight. The glamour which surrounded soldiers was not excuse enough. When the babies were born, and came to his notice, he consulted a Committee he had formed, of three married and two maiden ladies, who visited the mothers, and if necessary took the babies into a crèche; for those babies had a new value to the country, and were not—poor little things!—to be held responsible for their mothers' faults. He himself saw little of the young mothers; shy of them, secretly afraid, perhaps, of not being censorious enough. But once in a way Life set him face to face with one.

On New Year's Eve he was sitting in his study after tea, at that hour which he tried to keep for his parishioners, when a Mrs. Mitchett was announced, a small book-seller's wife, whom he knew for an occasional Communicant. She came in, accompanied by a young dark-eyed girl in a loose mouse-coloured coat. At his invitation they sat down in front of the long bookcase on the two green leather chairs which had grown worn in the service of the parish; and, screwed round in his chair at the bureau, with his long musician's fingers pressed together, he looked at them and waited. The woman had taken out her handkerchief, and was wiping her eyes; but the girl sat quiet, as the mouse she somewhat resembled in that coat.

"Yes, Mrs. Mitchett?" he said gently, at last.

The woman put away her handkerchief, sniffed resolutely, and began:

"It's 'Ilda, sir. Such a thing Mitchett and me never could 'ave expected, comin' on us so sudden. I thought it best to bring 'er round, poor girl. Of course, it's all the war. I've warned 'er a dozen times; but there it is, comin' next month, and the man in France." Pierson instinctively averted his gaze from the girl, who had not moved her eyes from his face, which she scanned with a seeming absence of interest, as if she had long given up thinking over her lot, and left it now to others.

"That is sad," he said; "very, very sad."

"Yes," murmured Mrs. Mitchett; "that's what I tell 'Ilda."

The girl's glance, lowered for a second, resumed its impersonal scrutiny of Pierson's face.

"What is the man's name and regiment? Perhaps we can get leave for him to come home and marry Hilda at once."

Mrs. Mitchett sniffed. "She won't give it, sir. Now, 'Ilda, give it to Mr. Pierson." And her voice had a real note of entreaty. The girl shook her head. Mrs. Mitchett murmured dolefully: "That's 'ow she is, sir; not a word will she say. And as I tell her, we can only think there must 'ave been more than one. And that does put us to shame so!"

But still the girl made no sign.

"You speak to her, sir; I'm really at my wit's end."

"Why won't you tell us?" said Pierson. "The man will want to do the right thing, I'm sure."

The girl shook her head, and spoke for the first time.

"I don't know his name."

Mrs. Mitchett's face twitched.

"Oh, dear!" she said: "Think of that! She's never said as much to us."

"Not know his name?" Pierson murmured. "But how—how could you——" he stopped, but his face had darkened. "Surely you would never have done such a thing without affection? Come, tell me!"

"I don't know it," the girl repeated.

"It's these Parks," said Mrs. Mitchett, from behind her handkerchief. "And to think that this'll be our first grandchild and all! 'Ilda *is* difficult; as quiet, as quiet; but *that* stubborn——"

Pierson looked at the girl, who seemed, if anything, less interested than ever. This impenetrability and something mulish in her attitude annoyed him. "I can't think," he said, "how you could so have forgotten yourself. It's truly grievous."

Mrs. Mitchett murmured: "Yes, sir; the girls gets it into their heads that there's going to be no young men for them."

"That's right," said the girl sullenly.

Pierson's lips grew tighter. "Well, what can I do for you, Mrs. Mitchett?" he said. "Does your daughter come to church?"

Mrs. Mitchett shook her head mournfully. "Never since she had her byke."

Pierson rose from his chair. The old story! Control and discipline undermined, and these bitter apples the result!

"Well," he said, "if you need our crèche, you have only to come to me," and he turned to the girl. "And you—won't you let this dreadful experience move your heart? My dear girl, we must all master ourselves, our passions, and our foolish wilfulness, especially in these times when our country needs us strong, and self-disciplined, not thinking of ourselves. I'm sure you're a good girl at heart."

The girl's dark eyes, unmoved from his face, roused in him a spasm of nervous irritation. "Your soul is in great danger, and you're very unhappy, I can see. Turn to God for help, and in His mercy everything will be made so different for you —so very different! Come!"

The girl said with a sort of surprising quietness: "I don't want the baby!"

The remark staggered him, almost as if she had uttered a hideous oath.

"'Ilda was in munitions," said her mother in an explanatory voice: "earnin' a matter of four pounds a week. Oh! dear, it is a waste an' all!" A queer, rather terrible little smile curled Pierson's lips.

"A judgment!" he said. "Good evening, Mrs. Mitchett. Good evening, Hilda. If you want me when the time comes, send for me."

They stood up; he shook hands with them; and was suddenly aware that the door was open, and Noel standing there. He had heard no sound; and how long she had been there he could not tell. There was a singular fixity in her face and attitude. She was staring at the girl, who, as she passed, lifted her face, so that the dark eyes and the grey eyes met. The door was shut, and Noel stood there alone with him.

"Aren't you early, my child?" said Pierson. "You came in very quietly."

"Yes; I heard."

A slight shock went through him at the tone of her voice; her face had that possessed look which he always dreaded. "What did you hear?" he said.

"I heard you say: 'A judgment!' You'll say the same to me, won't you? Only, *I do want my baby.*"

She was standing with her back to the door, over which a dark curtain hung; her face looked young and small against its stuff, her eyes very large. With one hand she plucked at her blouse, just over her heart.

Pierson stared at her, and gripped the back of the chair he had been sitting in. A lifetime of repression served him in the half-realised horror of that moment. He stammered out the single word: "Nollie!"

"It's quite true," she said, turned round, and went out.

Pierson had a sort of vertigo; if he had moved, he must have fallen down. Nollie! He slid round and sank into his chair, and by some horrible cruel fiction of his nerves, he seemed to feel Noel on his knee, as, when a little girl, she had been wont to sit, with her fair hair fluffing against his cheek. He seemed to feel that hair tickling his skin; it used to be the greatest comfort he had known since her mother died. At that moment his pride shrivelled like a flower held to a flame; all that abundant secret pride of a father who loves and admires, who worships still a dead wife in the children she has left him; who, humble by nature, yet never knows how proud he is till the bitter thing happens; all the long pride of the priest who, by dint of exhortation and remonstrance has coated himself in a superiority he hardly suspects—all this pride shrivelled in him. Then something writhed and cried within, as a tortured beast cries, at loss to know why it is being tortured. How many times has not a man used those words: "My God! My God! Why hast Thou forsaken me!" He sprang up and tried to pace his way out of this cage of confusion. His thoughts and feelings made the strangest medley, spiritual and worldly—Social ostracism—her soul in peril—a trial sent by God! The future! Imagination failed him. He went to his little piano, opened it, closed it again; took his hat, and stole out. He walked fast, without knowing where. It was very cold—a clear, bitter evening. Silent rapid motion in the frosty air was some relief. As Noel had fled from him, having uttered her news, so did he fly from her. The afflicted walk fast. He was soon down by the river, and turned West along its wall. The moon was up, bright and nearly full, and the steel-like shimmer of its light burnished the ebbing water. A cruel night! He came to the Obelisk, and leaned against it, overcome by a spasm of realisation. He seemed to see his dead wife's face staring at him out of the past, like an accusation. "How have you cared for Nollie, that she should have come to this?" It became the face of the moonlit sphinx, staring straight at him, the broad dark face with wide nostrils, cruel lips, full eyes blank of pupils, all livened and whitened by the moonlight—an embodiment of the

marvellous unseeing energy of Life, twisting and turning hearts without mercy. He gazed into those eyes with a sort of scared defiance. The great clawed paws of the beast, the strength and remorseless serenity of that crouching creature with human head, made living by his imagination and the moonlight, seemed to him like a temptation to deny God, like a refutation of human virtue.

Then, the sense of beauty stirred in him; he moved where he could see its flanks coated in silver by the moonlight, the ribs and the great muscles, and the tail with tip coiled over the haunch, like the head of a serpent. It was weirdly living, fine and cruel, that great man-made thing. It expressed something in the soul of man, pitiless and remote from love—or rather, the remorselessness which man had seen lurking within man's fate. Pierson recoiled from it, and resumed his march along the Embankment, almost deserted in the bitter cold. He came to where, in the opening of the Underground railway, he could see the little forms of people moving, little orange and red lights growing. The sight arrested him by its warmth and motion. Was it not all a dream? That woman and her daughter, had they really come? Had not Noel been but an apparition, her words a trick which his nerves had played him? Then, too vividly again, he saw her face against the dark stuff of the curtain, the curve of her hand plucking at her blouse, heard the sound of his own horrified: "Nollie!" No illusion, no deception! The edifice of his life was in the dust. And a queer and ghastly company of faces came about him; faces he had thought friendly, of good men and women whom he knew, yet at that moment did not know, all gathered round Noel, with fingers pointing at her. He staggered back from that vision, could not bear it, could not recognise this calamity. With a sort of comfort, yet an aching sense of unreality, his mind flew to all those summer holidays spent in Scotland, Ireland, Cornwall, Wales, by mountain and lake, with his two girls; what sunsets, and turning leaves, birds, beasts, and insects they had watched together! From their youthful companionship, their eagerness, their confidence in him, he had known so much warmth and pleasure. If all those memories were true, surely this could not be true. He felt suddenly that he must hurry back, go straight to Noel, tell her that she had been cruel to him, or assure himself that, for the moment, she had been insane. His temper rose suddenly, took fire. He felt anger against her,

against every one he knew, against life itself. Thrusting his hands deep into the pockets of his thin black overcoat, he plunged into that narrow glowing tunnel of the station booking-office, which led back to the crowded streets. But by the time he reached home his anger had evaporated; he felt nothing but utter lassitude. It was nine o'clock, and the maids had cleared the dining-table, in despair. Noel had gone up to her room. He had no courage left, and sat down supperless at his little piano, letting his fingers find soft painful harmonies, so that Noel perhaps heard the faint far thrumming of that music through uneasy dreams. And there he stayed, till it became time for him to go forth to the Old Year's Midnight Service.

When he returned, Pierson wrapped himself in a rug and lay down on the old sofa in his study. The maid, coming in next morning to "do" the grate, found him still asleep. She stood contemplating him in awe; a broad-faced, kindly, fresh-coloured girl. He lay with his face resting on his hand, his dark, just grizzled hair unruffled, as if he had not stirred all night; his other hand clutched the rug to his chest, and his booted feet protruded beyond it. To her young eyes he looked rather appallingly neglected. She gazed with interest at the hollows in his cheeks, and the furrows in his brow, and the lips, dark-moustached and bearded, so tightly compressed, even in sleep. Being holy didn't make a man happy, it seemed! What fascinated her were the cindery eyelashes resting on the cheeks, the faint movement of face and body as he breathed, the gentle hiss of breath escaping through the twitching nostrils. She moved nearer, bending down over him, with the childlike notion of counting those lashes. Her lips parted in readiness to say: "Oh!" if he waked. Something in his face, and the little twitches which passed over it, made her feel "that sorry" for him. He was a gentleman, had money, preached to her every Sunday, and was not so very old—what more could a man want? And yet—he looked so tired, with those cheeks. She pitied him; helpless and lonely he seemed to her, asleep there instead of going to bed properly. And sighing, she tiptoed towards the door.

"Is that you, Bessie?"

The girl turned: "Yes, sir. I'm sorry I woke you, sir. 'Appy New Year, sir!"

"Ah, yes. A Happy New Year, Bessie."

She saw his usual smile, saw it die, and a fixed look come on his face; it scared her, and she hurried away. Pierson had

remembered. For full five minutes he lay there staring at nothing. Then he rose, folded the rug mechanically, and looked at the clock. Eight! He went upstairs, knocked on Noel's door, and entered.

The blinds were drawn up, but she was still in bed. He stood looking down at her. "A Happy New Year, my child!" he said; and he trembled all over, shivering visibly. She looked so young and innocent, so round-faced and fresh, after her night's sleep, that the thought sprang up in him again: 'It must have been a dream!' She did not move, but a slow flush came up in her cheeks. No dream—no dream! He said tremulously: "I can't realise. I—I hoped I had heard wrong. Didn't I, Nollie? Didn't I?"

She just shook her head.

"Tell me everything," he said; "for God's sake!"

He saw her lips moving, and caught the murmur: "There's nothing more. Gratian and George know, and Leila. It can't be undone, Daddy. Perhaps I wouldn't have wanted to make sure, if you hadn't tried to stop Cyril and me—and I'm glad sometimes, because I shall have something of his——" She looked up at him. "After all, it's the same, really; only, there's no ring. It's no good talking to me now, as if I hadn't been thinking of this for ages. I'm used to anything you can say; I've said it to myself, you see. There's nothing but to make the best of it."

Her hot hand came out from under the bedclothes, and clutched his very tight. Her flush had deepened, and her eyes seemed to him to glitter.

"Oh, Daddy! You do look tired! Haven't you been to bed? Poor Daddy!"

That hot clutch, and the words: "Poor Daddy!" brought tears into his eyes. They rolled slowly down to his beard, and he covered his face with the other hand. Her grip tightened convulsively; suddenly she dragged it to her lips, kissed it, and let it drop.

"Don't!" she said, and turned away her face.

Pierson effaced his emotion, and said quite calmly:

"Shall you wish to be at home, my dear, or to go elsewhere?"

Noel had begun to toss her head on her pillow, like a feverish child whose hair gets in its eyes and mouth.

"Oh! I don't know; what does it matter?"

"Kestrel; would you like to go there? Your aunt—I could

write to her." Noel stared at him a moment; a struggle seemed going on within her.

"Yes," she said, "I would. Only, not Uncle Bob."

"Perhaps your uncle would come up here, and keep me company."

She turned her face away, and that tossing movement of the limbs beneath the clothes began again. "I don't care," she said; "anywhere—it doesn't matter."

Pierson put his chilly hand on her forehead. "Gently!" he said, and knelt down by the bed. "Merciful Father," he murmured, "give us strength to bear this dreadful trial. Keep my beloved child safe, and bring her peace; and give me to understand how I have done wrong, how I have failed towards Thee, and her. In all things chasten and strengthen her, my child, and me."

His thoughts moved on in the confused, inarticulate suspense of prayer, till he heard her say: "You haven't failed; why do you talk of failing—it isn't true; and don't pray for me, Daddy."

Pierson raised himself, and moved back from the bed. Her words confounded him, yet he was afraid to answer. She pushed her head deep into the pillow, and lay looking up at the ceiling.

"I shall have a son; Cyril won't quite have died. And I don't want to be forgiven."

He dimly perceived what long dumb processes of thought and feeling had gone on in her to produce this hardened state of mind, which to him seemed almost blasphemous. And in the very midst of this turmoil in his heart, he could not help thinking how lovely her face looked, lying back so that the curve of her throat was bared, with the short tendrils of hair coiling about it. That flung-back head, moving restlessly from side to side in the heat of the soft pillow, had such a passion of protesting life in it! And he kept silence.

"I want you to know it was all me. But I can't pretend. Of course I'll try and not let it hurt you more than I possibly can. I'm sorry for you, poor Daddy; oh! I'm sorry for you!" With a movement incredibly lithe and swift, she turned and pressed her face down in the pillow, so that all he could see was her tumbled hair and the bedclothing trembling above her shoulders. He tried to stroke that hair, but she shook her head free, and he stole out.

She did not come to breakfast; and when his own wretched meal was over, the mechanism of his professional life caught him again at once. New Year's Day! He had much to do. He had, before all, to be of a cheerful countenance before his flock, to greet all and any with an air of hope and courage.

X

1 §

Thirza Pierson, seeing her brother-in-law's handwriting, naturally said: "Here's a letter from Ted."

Bob Pierson, with a mouth full of sausage, as naturally responded:

"What does he say?"

In reading on, she found that to answer that question was one of the most difficult tasks ever set her. Its news moved and disturbed her deeply. Under her wing this disaster had happened! Down here had been wrought this most deplorable miracle, fraught with such dislocation of lives! Noel's face, absorbed and passionate, outside the door of her room on the night when Cyril Morland went away—her instinct had been right!

"He wants you to go up and stay with him, Bob."

"Why not both of us?"

"He wants Nollie to come down to me; she's not well."

"Not well? What's the matter?"

To tell him seemed disloyalty to her sex; not to tell him, disloyalty to her husband. A simple consideration of fact and not of principle, decided her. He would certainly say in a moment: 'Here! Pitch it over!' and she would have to. She said tranquilly:

"You remember that night when Cyril Morland went away, and Noel behaved so strangely. Well, my dear, she is going to have a child at the beginning of April. The poor boy is dead, Bob,—he died for the Country."

She saw the red tide flow up into his face.

"What!"

"Poor Edward is dreadfully upset. We must do what we can. I blame myself." By instinct she used those words.

"Blame yourself? Stuff! That young——!" He stopped.

Thirza said quietly: "No, Bob; of the two, I'm sure it was Noel; she was desperate that day. Don't you remember her

face? Oh! this war! It's turned the whole world upside down. That's the only comfort; nothing's normal."

Bob Pierson possessed beyond most men the secret of happiness, for he was always absorbed in the moment, to the point of unself-consciousness. Eating an egg, cutting down a tree, sitting on a Tribunal, making up his accounts, planting potatoes, looking at the moon, riding his cob, reading the Lessons—no part of him stood aside to see how he was doing it, or wonder why he was doing it, or not doing it better. He grew like a cork-tree, and acted like a sturdy and well-natured dog. His griefs, angers, and enjoyments were simple as a child's, or as his somewhat noisy slumbers. They were notably well-suited, for Thirza had the same secret of happiness, though her absorption in the moment did not—as became a woman—prevent her being conscious of others; indeed, such formed the chief subject of her absorptions. One might say that they neither of them had philosophy yet were as philosophic a couple as one could meet on this earth of the self-conscious. Daily life to these two was still of simple savour. To be absorbed in life—the queer endless tissue of moments and things felt and done and said and made, the odd inspiriting conjunctions of countless people—was natural to them; but they never thought whether they were absorbed or not, or had any particular attitude to Life or Death—a great blessing at the epoch in which they were living.

Bob Pierson, then, paced the room, so absorbed in his dismay and concern, that he was almost happy.

"By Jove!" he said, "what a ghastly thing! Nollie, of all people! I feel perfectly wretched, Thirza; wretched beyond words." But with each repetition his voice grew cheerier, and Thirza felt that he was already over the worst.

"Your coffee's getting cold!" she said.

"What do you advise? Shall I go up, heh?"

"I think you'll be a godsend to poor Ted; you'll keep his spirits up. Eve won't get any leave till Easter; and I can be quite alone, and see to Nollie here. The servants can have a holiday; Nurse and I will run the house together. I shall enjoy it."

"You're a good woman, Thirza!" Taking his wife's hand, he put it to his lips. "There isn't another woman like you in the world."

Thirza's eyes smiled. "Pass me your cup; I'll give you some fresh coffee."

It was decided to put the plan into operation at mid-month, and she bent all her wits to instilling into her husband the thought that a baby more or less was no great matter in a world which already contained twelve hundred million people. With a man's keener sense of family propriety, he could not see that this baby would be the same as any other baby. "By heaven!" he would say, "I simply can't get used to it; in our family! And Ted a parson! What the devil shall we do with it?"

"If Nollie will let us, why shouldn't we adopt it? It'll be something to take my thoughts off the boys."

"That's an idea! But Ted's a funny fellow. He'll have some doctrine of atonement, or other in his bonnet."

"Oh, bother!" said Thirza with asperity.

The thought of sojourning in town for a spell was not unpleasant to Bob Pierson. His Tribunal work was over, his early potatoes in, and he had visions of working for the Country, of being a special constable, and dining at his Club. The nearer he was to the front, and the more he could talk about the war, the greater the service he felt he would be doing. He would ask for a job where his brains would be of use. He regretted keenly that Thirza wouldn't be with him; a long separation like this would be a great trial. And he would sigh and run his fingers through his whiskers. Still for the Country, and for Nollie, one must put up with it!

When Thirza finally saw him into the train, tears stood in the eyes of both, for they were honestly attached, and knew well enough that this job, once taken in hand, would have to be seen through; a three months' separation at least.

"I shall write every day."

"So shall I, Bob."

"You won't fret, old girl?"

"Only if you do."

"I shall be up at 5.5, and she'll be down at 4.50. Give us a kiss—damn the porters. God bless you! I suppose she'd mind if I were to come down now and then?"

"I'm afraid she would. It's—it's—well, *you* know."

"Yes, yes; I do." And he really did; for underneath, he had true delicacy.

Her last words: "You're very sweet, Bob," remained in his ears all the way to Severn Junction.

She went back to the house, emptied of her husband, daughter,

boys, and maids; only the dogs left and the old nurse whom she had taken into confidence. Even in that sheltered, wooded valley it was very cold this winter. The birds hid themselves, not one flower bloomed, and the red-brown river was full and swift. The sound of trees being felled for trench props, in the wood above the house resounded all day long in the frosty air. She meant to do the cooking herself; and for the rest of the morning and early afternoon she concocted nice things, and thought out how she herself would feel if she were Noel and Noel she, so as to smooth out of the way anything which would hurt the girl. In the afternoon she went down to the station in the village car, the same which had borne Cyril Morland away that July night, for their coachman had been taken for the army, and the horses were turned out.

Noel looked tired and white, but calm—too calm. Her face seemed to Thirza to have fined down, and with those brooding eyes, to be more beautiful. In the car she possessed herself of the girl's hand, and squeezed it hard; their only allusion to the situation, except Noel's formal:

"Thank you so much, Auntie, for having me; it's most awfully sweet of you and Uncle Bob."

"There's no one in the house, my dear, except old Nurse. It'll be very dull for you; but I thought I'd teach you to cook; it's rather useful."

The smile which slipped on to Noel's face gave Thirza quite a turn.

She had assigned the girl a different room, and had made it extraordinarily cheerful with a log fire, chrysanthemums, bright copper candlesticks, warming-pans, and such like.

She went up with her at bedtime, and standing before the fire, said:

"You know, Nollie, I absolutely refuse to regard this as any sort of tragedy. To bring life into the world in these days, no matter how, ought to make anyone happy. I only wish I could do it again, then I should feel some use. Good night, dear; and if you want anything, knock on the wall. I'm next door. Bless you!" She saw that the girl was greatly moved, underneath her pale mask; and went out astonished at her niece's powers of self-control.

But she did not sleep at all well; for in imagination, she kept on seeing Noel turning from side to side in the big bed, and those great eyes of hers staring at the dark.

2 §

The meeting of the brothers Pierson took place at the dinner-hour, and was characterised by a truly English lack of display. They were so extremely different, and had been together so little since early days in their old Buckinghamshire home, that they were practically strangers, with just the potent link of far-distant memories in common. It was of these they talked, and about the war. On this subject they agreed in the large, and differed in the narrow. For instance, both thought they knew about Germany and other countries, and neither of course had any real knowledge of any country outside their own; for, though both had passed through considerable tracts of foreign ground at one time or another, they had never remarked anything except its surface, its churches, and its sunsets. Again, both assumed that they were democrats, but neither knew the meaning of the word, nor felt that the working man could be really trusted; and both revered Church and King. Both disliked conscription, but considered it necessary. Both favoured Home Rule for Ireland, but neither thought it possible to grant it. Both wished for the war to end, but were for prosecuting it to Victory, and neither knew what they meant by that word. So much for the large. On the narrower issues, such as strategy, and the personality of their country's leaders, they were opposed. Edward was a Westerner, Robert an Easterner, as was natural in one who had lived twenty-five years in Ceylon. Edward favoured the fallen government, Robert the risen. Neither had any particular reasons for their partisanship except what he had read in the journals. After all—what other reasons could they have had? Edward disliked the *Harmsworth Press;* Robert thought it was doing good. Robert was explosive, and rather vague; Edward dreamy, and a little didactic. Robert thought poor Ted looking like a ghost; Edward thought poor Bob looking like the setting sun. Their faces were indeed as curiously contrasted as their views and voices; the pale-dark, hollowed, narrow face of Edward, with its short, pointed beard, and the red-skinned, broad, full, whiskered face of Robert. They parted for the night with an affectionate hand-clasp.

So began a queer partnership which consisted, as the days went on, of half an hour's companionship at breakfast, each reading the paper; and of dinner together perhaps three times a week. Each thought his brother very odd, but continued to

hold the highest opinion of him. And, behind it all, the deep tribal sense that they stood together in trouble, grew. But of that trouble they never spoke, though not seldom Robert would lower his journal, and above the glasses perched on his well-shaped nose, contemplate his brother, and a little frown of sympathy would ridge his forehead between his bushy eyebrows. And once in a way he would catch Edward's eyes coming off duty from his journal, to look, not at his brother, but at—the skeleton; when that happened, Robert would adjust his glasses hastily, damn the newspaper type, and apologise to Edward for swearing. And he would think: 'Poor Ted! He ought to drink port, and—and enjoy himself, and forget it. What a pity he's a parson!'

In his letters to Thirza he would deplore Edward's asceticism. "He eats nothing, he drinks nothing, he smokes a miserable cigarette once in a blue moon. He's as lonely as a coot; it's a thousand pities he ever lost his wife. I expect to see his wings sprout any day; but—dash it all!—I don't believe he's got the flesh to grow them on. Send him up some clotted cream; I'll see if I can get him to eat it." When the cream came, he got Edward to eat some the first morning, and at tea time found that he had finished it himself. "We never talk about Nollie," he wrote, "I'm always meaning to have it out with him and tell him to buck up, but when it comes to the point I dry up; because, after all, I feel it too; it sticks in my gizzard horribly. We Piersons are pretty old, and we've always been respectable, ever since St. Bartholomew, when that Huguenot chap came over and founded us. The only black sheep I ever heard of is Cousin Leila. By the way, I saw her the other day; she came round here to see Ted. I remember going to stay with her and her first husband, young Fane, at Simla, when I was coming home, just before we were married. Phew! That was a queer ménage; all the young chaps fluttering round her, and young Fane looking like a cynical ghost. Even now she can't help setting her cap a little at Ted, and he swallows her whole; thinks her a devoted creature reformed to the nines with her hospital and all that. Poor old Ted; he is the most dreamy chap that ever was."

"We have had Gratian and her husband up for the week-end," he wrote a little later; "I don't like her so well as Nollie; too serious and downright for me. Her husband seems a sensible fellow, though; but the devil of a free-thinker. He and poor

Ted are like cat and dog. We had Leila in to dinner again on Saturday, and a man called Fort came too. She's sweet on him, I could see with half an eye, but poor old Ted can't. The doctor and Ted talked up hill and down dale. The doctor said a thing which struck me. 'What divides us from the beasts? Will power: nothing else. What's this war, really, but a death carnival of proof that man's will is invincible?' I stuck it down to tell you, when I got upstairs. He's a clever fellow. I believe in God, as you know, but I must say when it comes to an argument, poor old Ted does seem a bit weak, with his: 'We're told this,' and 'We're told that.' Nobody mentioned Nollie. I must have the whole thing out with Ted; we must know how to act when it's all over."

But not till the middle of March, when the brothers had been sitting opposite each other at meals for two months, was the subject broached between them, and then not by Robert. Edward, standing by the hearth after dinner, in his familiar attitude, one foot on the fender, one hand grasping the mantelshelf, and his eyes fixed on the flames, said: "I've never asked your forgiveness, Bob."

Robert, lingering at the table over his glass of port, started, looked at Edward's back in its parson's coat, and answered:

"My dear old chap!"

"It has been very difficult to speak of this."

"Of course, of course!" And there was a silence, while Robert's eyes travelled round the walls for inspiration. They encountered only the effigies of past Piersons—very oily works, and fell back on the dining-table. Edward went on speaking to the fire:

"It still seems to me incredible. Day and night I think of what it's my duty to do."

"Nothing!" ejaculated Robert. "Leave the baby with Thirza; we'll take care of it, and when Nollie's fit, let her go back to work in a hospital again. She'll soon get over it." He saw his brother shake his head, and thought: 'Ah! yes; now there's going to be some d——d conscientious complication."

Edward turned round on him: "That is very sweet of you both, but it would be wrong and cowardly for me to allow it."

The resentment which springs up in fathers when other fathers dispose of young lives, rose in Robert.

"Dash it all, my dear Ted, that's for Nollie to say. She's a woman now, remember."

A smile went straying about in the shadows of his brother's face. "A woman? Little Nollie! Bob, I've made a terrible mess of it with my girls." He hid his lips with his hand, and turned again to the flames. Robert felt a lump in his throat. "Oh! Hang it, old boy, I don't think that. What else could you have done? You take too much on yourself. After all, they're fine girls. I'm sure Nollie's a darling. It's these modern notions, and this war. Cheer up! It'll all dry straight." He went up to his brother and put a hand on his shoulder. Edward seemed to stiffen under that touch.

"Nothing comes straight," he said, "unless it's faced; you know that, Bob."

Robert's face was a study at that moment. His cheeks filled and collapsed again like a dog's when it has been rebuked. His colour deepened, and he rattled some money in a trouser pocket.

"Something in that, of course," he said gruffly. "All the same, the decision's with Nollie. We'll see what Thirza says. Anyway, there's no hurry. It's a thousand pities you're a parson; the trouble's enough without that."

Edward shook his head. "*My* position is nothing; it's the thought of my child, my wife's child. It's sheer pride; and I can't subdue it. I can't fight it down. God forgive me, I rebel."

And Robert thought: 'By George, he does take it to heart! Well, so should I! I do, as it is!' He took out his pipe, and filled it, pushing the tobacco down and down.

"I'm not a man of the world," he heard his brother say; "I'm out of touch with many things. It's almost unbearable to me to feel that I'm joining with the world to condemn my own daughter; not for their reasons, perhaps—I don't know; I hope not, but still, I'm against her."

Robert lit his pipe.

"Steady, old man!" he said. "It's a misfortune. But if I were you I should feel: 'She's done a wild, silly thing, but hang it, if anybody says a word against her, I'll wring his neck.' And what's more, you'll feel much the same, when it comes to the point." He emitted a huge puff of smake, which obscured his brother's face, and the blood, buzzing in his temples, seemed to thicken the sound of Edward's voice.

"I don't know; I've tried to see clearly. I have prayed to be shown what her duty is, and mine. It seems to me there can be no peace for her until she has atoned, by open suffering;

that the world's judgment is her cross, and she must bear it; especially in these days, when all the world is facing suffering so nobly. And then it seems so hard—so bitter; my poor little Nollie!"

There was a silence, broken only by the gurling of Robert's pipe, till he said abruptly:

"I don't follow you, Ted; no, I don't. I think a man should screen his children all he can. Talk to her as you like, but don't let the world do it. Dash it, the world's a rotten gambling place. I call myself a man of the world, but when it comes to private matters—well, then I draw the line. It seems to me—it seems to me inhuman. What does George Laird think about it? He's a knowing chap. I suppose you've—no, I suppose you haven't——" For a peculiar smile had come on Edward's face.

"No," he said, "I should hardly ask George Laird's opinion."

And Robert realised suddenly the stubborn loneliness of that thin black figure, whose fingers were playing with a little gold cross. 'By Jove!' he thought, 'I believe old Ted's like one of those Eastern chaps who go into lonely places. He's got himself surrounded by visions of things that aren't there. He lives in unreality—something we can't understand. I shouldn't be surprised if he heard voices, like—who was it? Tt, tt! What a pity!' Ted was deceptive. He was gentle and all that, a gentleman of course, and that disguised him; but underneath, what was there—a regular ascetic, a fakir! And a sense of bewilderment, of dealing with something which he could not grasp, beset Bob Pierson, so that he went back to the table, and sat down again beside his port.

"It seems to me," he said rather gruffly, "that the chicken had better be hatched before we count it." And then, sorry for his brusqueness, emptied his glass. As the fluid passed over his palate, he thought: 'Poor old Ted! He doesn't even drink—hasn't a pleasure in life, so far as I can see, except doing his duty, and doesn't even seem to know what that is. There aren't many like him—luckily! And yet I love him—pathetic chap!'

The "pathetic chap" was still staring at the flames.

3 §

And at this very hour, when the brothers were talking—for thought and feeling do pass mysteriously over the invisible wires of space—Cyril Morland's son was being born to Noel, a little before his time.

PART III

I

1 §

Down by the River Wye, among plum-trees in blossom, Noel had laid her baby in a hammock, and stood reading a letter:

"My dearest Nollie,

"Now that you are strong again, I feel that I must put before you my feeling as to your duty in this crisis of your life. Your aunt and uncle have made the most kind and generous offer to adopt your little boy. I have known that this was in their minds for some time, and have thought it over day and night for weeks. In the worldly sense it would be the best thing, no doubt. But this is a spiritual matter. The future of our souls depends on how we meet the consequences of our conduct. And painful, dreadful, indeed, as they must be, I am driven to feel that you can only reach true peace by facing them in a spirit of brave humility. I want you to think and think—till you arrive at a certainty which satisfies your conscience. If you decide, as I trust you will, to come back to me here with your boy, I shall do all in my power to make you happy while we face the future together. To do as your aunt and uncle in their kindness wish, would, I am sore afraid, end in depriving you of the inner strength and happiness which God only gives to those who do their duty and try courageously to repair their errors. I have confidence in you, my dear child.

"Ever your most loving father,

"Edward Pierson."

She read it through a second time, and looked at her baby. Daddy seemed to think that she might be willing to part from this wonderful creature! Sunlight fell through the plum blossom, in an extra patchwork quilt over the bundle lying there, touched the baby's nose and mouth, so that he sneezed. Noel laughed, and put her lips close to his face. 'Give you up!'

she thought: 'Oh, no! And I'm going to be happy too. They shan't stop me.'

In answer to the letter she said simply that she was coming up; and a week later she went, to the dismay of her uncle and aunt. The old nurse went too. Everything had hitherto been so carefully watched and guarded against by Thirza, that Noel did not really come face to face with her position till she reached home.

Gratian, transferred to a London Hospital, was now living at home. She had provided the house with new maids against her sister's return; and though Noel was relieved not to meet her old familiars, she encountered with difficulty the stolid curiosity of new faces. That morning before she left Kestrel, her aunt had come into her room while she was dressing, taken her left hand and slipped a little gold band on to its third finger.

"To please me, Nollie, now that you're going, just for the foolish, who know nothing about you."

Noel had suffered it with the thought: 'It's all very silly!' But now, when the new maid was pouring out her hot water, she was suddenly aware of the girl's round blue eyes wandering, as it were, mechanically to her hand. This little hoop of gold, then, had an awful power! A rush of disgust came over her. All life seemed suddenly a thing of forms and sham. Everybody then would look at that little ring; and she was a coward, saving herself from them! When she was alone again, she slipped it off, and laid it on the washstand, where the sunlight fell. Only this little shining band of metal, this little yellow ring, stood between her and the world's hostile scorn! Her lips trembled. She took up the ring, and went to the open window, to throw it out. But she did not, uncertain and unhappy—half realising the cruelty of life. A knock at the door sent her flying back to the wash-stand. The visitor was Gratian.

"I've been looking at him," she said softly; "he's like you, Nollie, except for his nose."

"He's hardly got one yet. But aren't his eyes intelligent? I think they're wonderful." She held up the ring: "What shall I do about this, Gratian?"

Gratian flushed. "Wear it. I don't see why outsiders should know. For the sake of Dad I think you ought. There's the parish."

Noel slipped the ring back on to her finger. "Would *you?*"

"I can't tell. I think I would."

Noel laughed suddenly. "I'm going to get cynical; I can feel it in my bones. How is Daddy looking?"

"Very thin; Mr. Lauder is back again from the Front for a bit, and taking some of the work now."

"Do I hurt him very much still?"

"He's awfully pleased that you've come. He's as sweet as he can be about you."

"Yes," murmured Noel, "that's what's dreadful. I'm glad he wasn't in when I came. Has he told anyone?"

Gratian shook her head. "I don't think anybody knows; unless—perhaps Captain Fort. He came in again the other night, and somehow——"

Noel flushed. "Leila!" she said enigmatically. "Have you seen her?"

"I went to her flat last week with Dad—he likes her."

"Delilah is her real name, you know. All men like her. And Captain Fort is her lover."

Gratian gasped. Noel would say things sometimes which made her feel the younger of the two.

"Of course he is," went on Noel in a hard voice. "She has no men friends; her sort never have, only lovers. Why do you think he knows about me?"

"When he asked after you he looked——"

"Yes; I've seen him look like that when he's sorry for anything. I don't care. Has Monsieur Lavendie been in lately?"

"Yes; he looks awfully unhappy."

"His wife drugs."

"Oh, Nollie! How do you know?"

"I saw her once; I'm sure she does; there was a smell; and she's got wandering eyes that go all glassy. He can paint me now, if he likes. I wouldn't let him before. Does *he* know?"

"Of course not."

"He knows there was something; he's got second sight, I think. But I mind him less than anybody. Is his picture of Daddy good?"

"Powerful, but it hurts, somehow."

"Let's go down and see it."

The picture was hung in the drawing-room, and its intense modernity made that old-fashioned room seem lifeless and strange. The black figure, with long pale fingers touching the paler piano keys, had a frightening actuality. The face, three-quarters full, was raised as if for inspiration, and the eyes

rested, dreamy and unseeing, on the face of a girl painted and hung on a background of wall above the piano.

"It's the face of that girl," said Gratian, when they had looked at the picture for some time in silence.

"No," said Noel, "it's the look in his eyes."

"But why did he choose such a horrid, common girl? Isn't she fearfully alive, though? She looks as if she were saying: 'Cheerio!'"

"She is; it's awfully pathetic, I think. Poor Daddy!"

"It's a libel," said Gratian stubbornly.

"No. That's what hurts. He isn't quite—quite all there. Will he be coming in soon?"

Gratian took her arm, and pressed it hard. "Would you like me at dinner or not; I can easily be out?"

Noel shook her head. "It's no good to funk it. He wanted me, and now he's got me. Oh! why did he? It'll be awful for him."

Gratian sighed. "I've tried my best, but he always said: 'I've thought so long about it all that I can't think any longer. I can only feel the braver course is the best. When things are bravely and humbly met, there will be charity and forgiveness.'"

"There *won't*," said Noel, "Daddy's a saint, and he doesn't see."

"Yes, he is a saint. But one must think for oneself—one simply *must*. I can't believe as he does, any more; can you, Nollie?"

"I don't know. When I was going through it, I prayed; but I don't know whether I really believed. I don't think I mind much about that, one way or the other."

"I mind terribly," said Gratian, "I want the truth."

"I don't know what I want," said Noel slowly, "except that sometimes I want—life; awfully."

And the two sisters were silent, looking at each other with a sort of wonder.

2 §

Noel had a fancy to put on a bright-coloured blue frock that evening, and at her neck she hung a Breton cross of old paste, which had belonged to her mother. When she had finished dressing she went into the nursery and stood by the baby's cot. The old nurse who was sitting there beside him, got up at once and said:

"He's sleeping beautiful—the lamb. I'll go down and get a cup o' tea, and come up, ma'am, when the gong goes." In the way peculiar to those who have never to initiate, but only to support positions in which they are placed by others, she had adopted for herself the theory that Noel was a real war-widow. She knew the truth perfectly; for she had watched that hurried little romance at Kestrel, but by dint of charity and blurred meditations it was easy for her to imagine the marriage ceremony which would and should have taken place; and she was zealous that other people should imagine it too. It was so much more regular and natural like that, and "her" baby invested with his proper dignity. She went downstairs to get a "cup o' tea," thinking: 'A picture they make—that they do, bless his little heart; and his pretty little mother—no more than a child, all said and done.'

Noel had been standing there some minutes in the failing light, absorbed in the face of the sleeping baby, when, raising her eyes, she saw in a mirror the reflection of her father's dark figure by the door. She could hear him breathing as if the ascent of the stairs had tired him; and moving to the head of the cot, she rested her hand on it, and turned her face towards him. He came up and stood beside her, looking silently down at the baby. She saw him make the sign of the Cross above it, and the movement of his lips in prayer. Love for her father, and rebellion against this intercession for her perfect baby fought so hard in the girl's heart that she felt suffocated, and glad of the dark, so that he could not see her eyes. Then he took her hand and put it to his lips, but still without a word; and for the life of her she could not speak either. In silence, he kissed her forehead; and there mounted in Noel a sudden passion of longing to show him her pride and love for her baby. She put her finger down and touched one of his hands. The tiny sleeping fingers uncurled and, like some little sea anemone, clutched round it. She heard her father draw his breath in; saw him turn away quickly, silently, and go out. And she stayed, hardly breathing, with the hand of her baby squeezing her finger.

II

1 §

When Edward Pierson, afraid of his own emotion, left the twilit nursery, he slipped into his own room, and fell on his knees beside his bed, absorbed in the vision he had seen. That young figure in Madonna blue, with the halo of bright hair; the sleeping babe in the fine dusk; the silence, the adoration in that white room! He saw, too, a vision of the past, when Noel herself had been the sleeping babe within her mother's arm, and he had stood beside them, wondering and giving praise. It passed with its other-worldliness and the fine holiness which belongs to beauty, passed and left the tormenting realism of life. Ah! to live with only the inner meaning, spiritual and beautified, in a rare wonderment such as he had experienced just now!

His alarum clock, while he knelt in his narrow, monkish little room—ticked the evening hour away into darkness. And still he knelt, dreading to come back into it all, to face the world's eyes, and the sound of the world's tongue, and the touch of the rough, the gross, the unseemly. How could he guard his child? How preserve that vision in her life, in her spirit, about to enter such cold, rough waters? But the gong sounded; he got up, and went downstairs.

But this first family moment, which all had dreaded, was relieved, as dreaded moments so often are, by the unexpected appearance of the Belgian painter. He had a general invitation, of which he often availed himself; but he was so silent, and his thin, beardless face, which seemed all eyes and brow, so mournful, that all three felt in the presence of a sorrow deeper even than their own family grief. During the meal he gazed silently at Noel. Once he said: "You will let me paint you now, mademoiselle, I hope?" and his face brightened a little when she nodded. There was never much talk when he came, for any depth of discussion, even of art, brought out at once too wide a difference. And Pierson could never avoid a vague irritation with one who clearly had spirituality, but of a sort which he could not understand. After dinner he excused himself, and

went off to his study. Monsieur would be happier alone with the two girls! Gratian, too, got up. She had remembered Noel's words: "I mind him less than anybody." It was a chance for Nollie to break the ice.

§ 2 §

"I have not seen you for a long time, *mademoiselle,*" said the painter, when they were alone.

Noel was sitting in front of the empty drawingroom hearth, with her arms stretched out as if there had been a fire there.

"I've been away. How are you going to paint me, *monsieur?*"

"In that dress, *mademoiselle;* just as you are now, warming yourself at the fire of life."

"But it isn't there."

"Yes, fires soon go out. *Mademoiselle,* will you come and see my wife? She is ill."

"Now?" asked Noel, startled.

"Yes, now. She is really ill, and I have no one there. That is what I came to ask of your sister; but now you are here, it's even better. She likes you."

Noel got up. "Wait one minute!" she said, and ran upstairs. Her baby was asleep, and the old nurse dozing. Putting on a cloak and cap of grey rabbit's fur, she ran down again to the hall where the painter was waiting; and they went out together.

"I do not know if I am to blame," he said, "my wife has been no real wife to me since she knew I had a mistress and was no real husband to her."

Noel stared round at his face lighted by a queer smile.

"Yes," he went on, "from that has come her tragedy. But she should have known before I married her. Nothing was concealed. *Bon Dieu!* she should have known! Why cannot a woman see things as they are? My mistress, *mademoiselle,* is not a thing of flesh. It is my art. It has always been first with me, and always will. She has never accepted that—she is incapable of accepting it. I am sorry for her. But what would you? I was a fool to marry her. *Chère mademoiselle,* no troubles are anything beside the trouble which goes on day and night, meal after meal, year after year, between two people who should never have married, because one loves too much

and requires all, and the other loves not at all—no, not at all, now, it is long dead—and can give but little."

"Can't you separate?" asked Noel, wondering.

"It is hard to separate from one who craves for you as she craves her drugs—yes, she takes drugs now, *mademoiselle.* It is impossible for one who has any compassion in his soul. Besides, what would she do? We live from hand to mouth, in a strange land. She has no friends here, not one. How could I leave her while this war lasts? As well could two persons on a desert island separate. She is killing herself, too, with these drugs, and I cannot stop her."

"Poor *madame!*" murmured Noel. "Poor *monsieur!*"

The painter drew his hand across his eyes.

"I cannot change my nature," he said in a stifled voice, "nor she hers. So we go on. But life will stop suddenly some day for one of us. After all, it is much worse for her than for me. Enter, *mademoiselle.* Do not tell her I am going to paint you; she likes you, because you refused to let me."

Noel went up the stairs, shuddering; she had been there once before, and remembered that sickly scent of drugs. On the third floor they entered a small sitting-room whose walls were covered with paintings and drawings; from one corner a triangular stack of canvases jutted out. There was little furniture save an old red sofa, and on this was seated a stoutish man in the garb of a Belgian soldier, with his elbows on his knees and his bearded cheeks resting on his doubled fists. Beside him on the sofa, nursing a doll, was a little girl, who looked up at Noel. She had a most strange, attractive, pale little face, with pointed chin and large eyes, which never moved from this apparition in grey rabbits' skins.

"Ah, Barra! You here!" said the painter: "*Mademoiselle,* this is *Monsieur* Barra, a friend of ours from the front; and this is our landlady's little girl. A little refugee, too, aren't you, Chica?"

The child gave him a sudden brilliant smile and resumed her grave scrutiny of the visitor. The soldier, who had risen heavily, offered Noel one of his podgy hands, with a sad and heavy giggle.

"Sit down, *mademoiselle,*" said Lavendie, placing a chair for her: "I will bring my wife in," and he went out through some double doors.

Noel sat down. The soldier had resumed his old attitude, and

the little girl her nursing of the doll, though her big eyes still watched the visitor. Overcome by strangeness, Noel made no attempt to talk. And presently through the double doors the painter and his wife came in. She was a thin woman in a red wrapper, with hollow cheeks, high cheek-bones, and hungry eyes; her dark hair hung loose, and one hand played restlessly with a fold of her gown. She took Noel's hand; and her uplifted eyes seemed to dig into the girl's face, to let go suddenly, and flutter.

"How do you do?" she said in English. "So Pierre brought you to see me again. I remember you so well. You would not let him paint you. *Ah! que c'est drôle!* You are so pretty too. *Hein, Monsieur* Barra, is not *mademoiselle* pretty?"

The soldier gave his heavy giggle, and resumed his scrutiny of the floor.

"Henriette," said Lavendie, "sit down beside *Chica*—you must not stand. Sit down, *mademoiselle,* I beg."

"I'm so sorry you're not well," said Noel, and sat down again.

The painter stood leaning against the wall, and his wife looked up at his tall, thin figure, with eyes which had in them anger, and a sort of cunning.

"A great painter, my husband, is he not?" she said to Noel. "You would not imagine what that man can do. And how he paints—all day long; and all night in his head. And so you would not let him paint you, after all?"

Lavendie said impatiently: "*Voyons, Henriette, causez d'autre chose.*"

His wife plucked nervously at a fold in her red gown, and gave him the look of a dog that has been rebuked.

"I am a prisoner here, *mademoiselle,* I never leave the house. Here I live day after day—my husband is always painting. Who would go out alone under this grey sky of yours, and the hatreds of the war in every face? I prefer to keep my room. My husband goes painting; every face he sees interests him, except that which he sees every day. But I am a prisoner. *Monsieur* Barra is our first visitor for a long time."

The soldier raised his face from his fists. "*Prisonnier, madame!* What would you say if you were out there?" And he gave his thick giggle. "We are the prisoners, we others. What would you say to imprisonment by explosion day and night, never a minute free. Bom! Bom! Bom! *Ah! les tranchées!* It's not so free as all that, there."

"Every one has his own prison," said Lavendie bitterly.

"*Mademoiselle* even, has her prison—and little Chica, and her doll. Every one has his prison, Barra. *Monsieur* Barra is also a painter, *mademoiselle.*"

"*Moi!*" said Barra, lifting his heavy hairy hand. "I paint puddles, star-bombs, horses' ribs—I paint holes and holes and holes, wire and wire and wire, and water—long white ugly water. I paint splinters, and men's souls naked, and men's bodies dead, and nightmare—nightmare—all day and all night—I paint them in my head." He suddenly ceased speaking and relapsed into contemplation of the carpet, with his bearded cheeks resting on his fists. "And their souls as white as snow, *les camarades,*" he added suddenly and loudly, "millions of Belgians, English, French, even the Boches, with white souls. I paint those souls!"

A little shiver ran through Noel, and she looked appealingly at Lavendie.

"Barra," he said, as if the soldier were not there, "is a great painter, but the Front has turned his head a little. What he says is true, though. There is no hatred out there. It is here that we are prisoners of hatred, *mademoiselle;* avoid hatreds—they are poison!"

His wife put out her hand and touched the child's shoulder.

"Why should we not hate?" she said. "Who killed Chica's father, and blew her home to rags? Who threw her out into this horrible England—*pardon, mademoiselle,* but it is horrible. *Ah! les Boches!* If my hatred could destroy them there would not be one left. Even my husband was not so mad about his painting when we lived at home. But here——!" Her eyes darted at his face again, and then sank as if rebuked. Noel saw the painter's lips move. The sick woman's whole figure writhed.

"It is mania, your painting!" She looked at Noel with a smile. "Will you have some tea, *mademoiselle? Monsieur* Barra, some tea?"

The soldier said thickly: "No, *madame;* in the trenches we have tea enough. It consoles us. But when we get away—give us wine, *le bon vin; le bon petit vin!*"

"Get some wine, Pierre!"

Noel saw from the painter's face that there was no wine, and perhaps no money to get any; but he went quickly out. She rose and said:

"I must be going, *madame.*"

Madame Lavendie leaned forward and clutched her wrist. "Wait a little, *mademoiselle.* We shall have some wine, and

Pierre shall take you back presently. You cannot go home alone —you are too pretty. Is she not, *Monsieur* Barra?"

The soldier looked up: "What would you say," he said, "to bottles of wine bursting in the air, bursting red and bursting white, all day long, all night long? Great steel bottles, large as Chica: bits of bottles, carrying off men's heads? Bsum, garra-a-a, and a house comes down, and little bits of people ever so small, ever so small, tiny bits in the air and all over the ground. Great souls out there, *madame.* But I will tell you a secret," and again he gave his heavy giggle, "all a little, little mad; nothing to speak of—just a little bit mad; like a watch, you know, that you can wind for ever. That is the discovery of this war, *mademoiselle,*" he said, addressing Noel for the first time, "you cannot gain a great soul till you are a little mad." And lowering his piggy grey eyes at once, he resumed his former attitude. "It is that madness I shall paint some day," he announced to the carpet; "lurking in one tiny corner of each soul of all those millions, as it creeps, as it peeps, ever so sudden, ever so little, when we all think it has been put to bed, here—there, now—then, when you least think; in and out like a mouse with bright eyes. Millions of men with white souls, all a little mad. A great subject, I think," he added heavily. Involuntarily Noel put her hand to her heart, which was beating fast. She felt quite sick.

"How long have you been at the Front, *monsieur?*"

"Two years, *mademoiselle.* Time to go home and paint, is it not? But art——!" he shrugged his heavy round shoulders, his whole bear-like body. "A little mad," he muttered once more. "I will tell you a story. Once in winter after I had rested a fortnight, I go back to the trenches at night, and I want some earth to fill up a hole in the ground where I was sleeping; when one has slept in a bed one becomes particular. Well, I scratch it from my parapet, and I come to something funny. I strike my briquet, and there is a Boche's face all frozen and earthy and dead and greeny-white in the flame from my briquet."

"Oh, no!"

"Oh! but yes, *mademoiselle;* true as I sit here. Very useful in the parapet—dead Boche. Once a man like me. But in the morning I could not stand him; we dug him out and buried him, and filled the hole up with other things. But there I stood in the night, and my face as close to his as this"—and he held

his thick hand a foot before his face. "We talked of our homes; he had a soul, that man. *Il me disait des choses,* how he had suffered; and I, too, told him my sufferings. Dear God, we know all; we shall never know more than we know out there, we others, for we are mad—nothing to speak of, but just a little, little mad. When you see us, *mademoiselle,* walking the streets, remember that." And he dropped his face on to his fists again.

A silence had fallen in the room—very queer and complete. The little girl nursed her doll, the soldier gazed at the floor, the woman's mouth moved stealthily, and in Noel the thought rushed continually to the verge of action: 'Couldn't I get up and run downstairs?' But she sat on, hypnotised by that silence, till Lavendie reappeared with a bottle and four glasses.

"To drink our health, and wish us luck, *mademoiselle,*" he said.

Noel raised the glass he had given her. "I wish you all happiness."

"And you, *mademoiselle,*" the two men murmured.

She drank a little, and rose.

"And now, *mademoiselle,*" said Lavendie, "if you must go, I will see you home."

Noel took Madame Lavendie's hand; it was cold, and returned no pressure; her eyes had the glazed look that she remembered. The soldier had put his empty glass down on the floor, and was regarding it unconscious of her. Noel turned quickly to the door; the last thing she saw was the little girl nursing her doll.

In the street the painter began at once in his rapid French.

"I ought not to have asked you to come, *mademoiselle;* I did not know our friend Barra was there. Besides, my wife is not fit to receive a lady; *vous voyez qu'il y a de la manie dans cette pauvre tête.* I should not have asked you; but I was so miserable."

"Oh!" murmured Noel, "I know."

"In our home over there she had interests. In this great town she can only nurse her grief against me. Ah! this war! It seems to me we are all in the stomach of a great coiling serpent. We lie there, being digested. In a way it is better out there in the trenches; they are beyond hate, they have attained a height that we have not. It is wonderful how they still can be for going on till they have beaten the Boche; that is curious and it is very great. Did Barra tell you how, when they come back—all these fighters—they are going to rule, and man-

age the future of the world? But it will not be so. They will mix in with life, separate—be scattered, and they will be ruled as they were before. The tongue and the pen will rule them: those who have not seen the war will rule them."

"Oh!" cried Noel, "surely they will be the bravest and strongest in the future."

The painter smiled.

"War makes men simple," he said, "elemental; life in peace is neither simple nor elemental, it is subtle, full of changing environments, to which man must adapt himself; the cunning, the astute, the adaptable, will ever rule in times of peace. It is pathetic, the belief of those brave soldiers that the future is theirs."

"He said a strange thing," murmured Noel; "that they were all a little mad."

"He is a man of queer genius—Barra; you should see some of his earlier pictures. Mad is not quite the word, but something is loosened, is rattling round in them, they have lost proportion, they are being forced in one direction. I tell you, *mademoiselle,* this war is one great forcing-house; every living plant is being made to grow too fast, each quality, each passion; hate and love, intolerance and lust and avarice, courage and energy; yes, and self-sacrifice—all are being forced and forced beyond their strength, beyond the natural flow of the sap, forced till there has come a great wild luxuriant crop, and then—Psum! Presto! The change comes, and these plants will wither and rot and stink. But we who see Life in forms of Art are the only ones who feel that; and we are so few. The natural shape of things is lost. There is a mist of blood before all eyes. Men are afraid of being fair. See how we all hate not only our enemies, but those who differ from us. Look at the streets too—see how men and women rush together, how Venus reigns in this forcing-house. Is it not natural that Youth about to die should yearn for pleasure, for love, for union, before death?"

Noel stared up at him. 'Now!' she thought: 'I will.'

"Yes," she said, "I know that's true, because I rushed, myself. I'd like you to know. We couldn't be married—there wasn't time. And he was killed. But his son is alive. That's why I've been away so long. I want every one to know." She spoke very calmly, but her cheeks felt burning hot.

The painter had made an upward movement of his hands, as

if they had been jerked by an electric current, then he said quite quietly:

"My profound respect, *mademoiselle,* and my great sympathy. And your father?"

"It's awful for him."

The painter said gently: "Ah! *mademoiselle,* I am not so sure. Perhaps he does not suffer so greatly. Perhaps not even your trouble can hurt him very much. He lives in a world apart. That, I think, is his true tragedy—to be alive, and yet not living enough to feel reality. Do you know Anatole France's description of an old woman: *'Elle vivait, mais si peu.'* Would that not be well said of the Church in these days: *'Elle vivait, mais si peu.'* I see him always like a rather beautiful dark spire in the night-time when you cannot see how it is attached to the earth. He does not know, he never will know, Life."

Noel looked round at him. "What do you mean by Life, *monsieur?* I'm always reading about Life, and people talk of seeing Life! What is it—where is it? I never see anything that you could call Life."

The painter smiled.

"To '*see* life'!" he said. "Ah! that is different. To enjoy yourself! Well, it is my experience that when people are 'seeing life' as they call it, they are not enjoying themselves. You know when one is very thirsty one drinks and drinks, but the thirst remains all the same. There are places where one can see life as it is called, but the only persons you will see enjoying themselves at such places are a few humdrums like myself, who go there for a talk over a cup of coffee. Perhaps at your age, though, it is different."

Noel clasped her hands, and her eyes seemed to shine in the gloom. "I want music and dancing and light, and beautiful things and faces; but I never get them."

"No, there does not exist in this town, or in any other, a place which will give you that. Fox-trots and ragtime and paint and powder and glare and half-drunken young men, and women with red lips—you can get them in plenty. But rhythm and beauty and charm—never. In Brussels when I was younger I saw much 'life' as they call it, but not one lovely thing unspoiled; it was all as ashes in the mouth. Ah! you may smile, but I know what I am talking of. Happiness never comes when you are looking for it, *mademoiselle;* beauty is in Nature and in real art, never in these false silly make-believes. There is a

place just here where we Belgians go; would you like to see how true my words are?"

"Oh, yes!"

"*Très-bien!* Let us go in?"

They passed into a revolving doorway with little glass compartments which shot them out into a shining corridor. At the end of this the painter looked at Noel and seemed to hesitate, then he turned off from the room they were about to enter into a room on the right. It was large, full of gilt and plush and marble tables, where couples were seated; young men in khaki and older men in plain clothes, together or with young women. At these last Noel looked, face after face, while they were passing down a long way to an empty table. She saw that some were pretty, and some only trying to be, that nearly all were powdered and had their eyes darkened and their lips reddened, till she felt her own face to be dreadfully ungarnished. Up in a gallery a small band was playing an attractive jingling hollow little tune; and the buzz of talk and laughter was almost deafening.

"What will you have, *mademoiselle?*" said the painter. "It is just nine o'clock; we must order quickly."

"May I have one of those green things?"

"*Deux crêmes de menthe,*" said Lavendie to the waiter.

Noel was too absorbed to see the queer, bitter little smile hovering about his face. She was busy looking at the faces of women whose eyes, furtively cold and enquiring, were fixed on her; and at the faces of men with eyes that were furtively warm and wondering.

"I wonder if Daddy was ever in a place like this?" she said, putting the glass of green stuff to her lips. "Is it nice? It smells of peppermint."

"A beautiful colour. Good luck, *mademoiselle!*" and he chinked his glass with hers.

Noel sipped, held it away, and sipped again.

"It's nice; but awfully sticky. May I have a cigarette?"

"*Des cigarettes,*" said Lavendie to the waiter, "*et deux cafés noirs.* Now, *mademoiselle,*" he murmured when they were brought, "if we imagine that we have drunk a bottle of wine each, we shall have exhausted all the preliminaries of what is called Vice. Amusing, isn't it?" He shrugged his shoulders.

His face struck Noel suddenly as tarnished and almost sullen.

"Don't be angry, *monsieur,* it's all new to me, you see."

The painter smiled, his bright, skin-deep smile.

"Pardon! I forget myself. Only, it hurts me to see beauty in a place like this. It does not go well with that tune, and these voices, and these faces. Enjoy yourself, *mademoiselle;* drink it all in! See the way these people look at each other; what love shines in their eyes! A pity, too, we cannot hear what they are saying. Believe me, their talk is most subtle, *très-spirituel.* These young women are 'doing their bit,' as you call it; bringing *le plaisir* to all these who are serving their country. Eat, drink, love, for to-morrow we die. Who cares for the world simple or the world beautiful, in days like these? The house of the spirit is empty."

He was looking at her sidelong as if he would enter her very soul.

Noel got up. "I'm ready to go, *monsieur.*"

He put her cloak on her shoulders, paid the bill, and they went out, threading again through the little tables, through the buzz of talk and laughter and the fumes of tobacco, while another hollow little tune jingled away behind them.

"Through there," said the painter, pointing to another door, "they dance. So it goes. London in war-time! Well, after all, it is never very different; no great town is. Did you enjoy your sight of 'life,' *mademoiselle?*"

"I think one must dance, to be happy. Is that where your friends go?"

"Oh, no! To a room much rougher, and play dominoes, and drink coffee and beer, and talk. They have no money to throw away."

"Why didn't you show me?"

"*Mademoiselle,* in that room you might see someone perhaps whom one day you would meet again; in the place we visited you were safe enough—at least I hope so."

Noel shrugged. "I suppose it doesn't matter now, what I do."

And a rush of emotion caught at her throat—a wave from the past—the moonlit night, the dark old Abbey, the woods and the river. Two tears rolled down her cheeks.

"I was thinking of something," she said in a muffled voice. "It's all right."

"*Chère mademoiselle!*" Lavendie murmured; and all the way home he was timid and distressed. Shaking his hand at the door, she murmured:

"I'm sorry I was such a fool; and thank you awfully, *monsieur*. Good night."

"Good night; and better dreams. There is a good time coming—Peace and Happiness once more in the world. It will not always be this Forcing-house. Good night, *chère mademoiselle!*"

Noel went up to the nursery, and stole in. A night-light was burning. Nurse and baby were fast asleep. She tiptoed through into her own room. Once there, she felt suddenly so tired that she could hardly undress; and yet curiously rested, as if with that rushed of emotion, Cyril and the past had slipped from her for ever.

III

1 §

Noel's first encounter with Opinion took place the following day. The baby had just come in from its airing; she had seen it comfortably snoozing, and was on her way downstairs, when a voice from the hall said:

"How do you do?" and she saw the khaki-clad figure of Adrian Lauder, her father's curate! Hesitating just a moment, she finished her descent, and put her fingers in his. He was a rather heavy, dough-coloured young man of nearly thirty, unsuited by khaki, with a round white collar buttoned behind; but his aspiring eyes redeemed him, proclaiming the best intentions in the world, and an inclination towards sentiment in the presence of beauty.

"I haven't seen you for ages," he said rather fatuously, following her into her father's study.

"No," said Noel. "How do you like being at the Front?"

"Ah!" he said, "they're wonderful!" And his eyes shone. "It's so nice to see you again."

"Is it?"

He seemed puzzled by that answer; stammered, and said:

"I didn't know your sister had a baby. A jolly baby."

"She hasn't."

Lauder's mouth opened. 'A silly mouth,' she thought.

"Oh!" he said. "Is it a *protégé*—Belgian or something?"

"No, it's mine; my own." And, turning round, she slipped the little ring off her finger. When she turned back to him, his face had not recovered from her words. It had a hapless look, as if one to whom such a thing ought not to have happened.

"Don't look like that," said Noel. "Didn't you understand? It's mine—mine." She put out her left hand. "Look! There's no ring."

He stammered: "I say, you oughtn't to—you oughtn't to——!"

"What?"

"Joke about—about such things; ought you?"

"One doesn't joke if one's had a baby without being married, you know."

Lauder went suddenly slack. A shell might have burst a few paces from him. And then, just as one would in such a case, he made an effort, braced himself, and said in a curious voice, both stiff and heavy: "I can't—one doesn't—it's not——"

"It is," said Noel. "If you don't believe me, ask Daddy."

He put his hand up to his round collar; and with the wild thought that he was going to tear it off, she cried: "Don't!"

"*You!*" he said. "*You!* But——"

Noel turned away from him to the window. She stood looking out, but saw nothing whatever.

"I don't want it hidden," she said without turning round, "I want every one to know. It's stupid as it is—stupid!" and she stamped her foot. "Can't you see how stupid it is—everybody's mouth falling open!"

He uttered a little sound which had pain in it, and she felt a real pang of compunction. He had gripped the back of a chair; his face had lost its heaviness. A dull flush coloured his cheeks. Noel had a feeling, as if she had been convicted of treachery. It was his silence, the curious look of an impersonal pain beyond power of words; she felt in him something much deeper than mere disapproval—something which echoed within herself. She walked quickly past him and escaped. She ran upstairs and threw herself on her bed. He was nothing: it was not that! It was in herself, the awful feeling, for the first time developed and poignant, that she had betrayed her caste, forfeited the right to be thought a lady, betrayed her secret reserve and refinement, repaid with black ingratitude the love lavished on her upbringing, by behaving like any uncared-for common girl. She had never felt this before—not even when Gratian first heard of it, and they had stood one at each end of the hearth, unable to speak. Then she still had her passion, and her grief for the dead. That was gone now as if it had never been; and she had no defence, nothing between her and this crushing humiliation and chagrin. She had been mad! She must have been mad! The Belgian Barra was right: "All a little mad" in this "forcing-house" of a war! She buried her face deep in the pillow, till it almost stopped her power of breathing; her head and cheeks and ears seemed to be on fire. If only he had shown disgust, done something which roused her temper, her sense of justice, her feeling that Fate had been too cruel to her;

but he had just stood there, bewilderment incarnate, like a creature with some very deep illusion shattered. It was horrible! Then, feeling that she could not stay still, must walk, run, get away somehow from this feeling of treachery and betrayal, she sprang up. All was quiet below, and she slipped downstairs and out, speeding along with no knowledge of direction, taking the way she had taken day after day to her hospital. It was the last of April, trees and shrubs were luscious with blossom and leaf; the dogs ran gaily; people had almost happy faces in the sunshine. 'If I could get away from myself, I wouldn't care,' she thought. Easy to get away from people, from London, even from England perhaps; but from oneself—impossible! She passed her hospital, and looked at it dully, at the Red Cross flag against its stucco wall, and a soldier in his blue slops and red tie, coming out. She had spent many miserable hours there, but none quite so miserable as this. She passed the church opposite to the flats where Leila lived, and running suddenly into a tall man coming round the corner, saw Fort. She bent her head, and tried to hurry past. But his hand was held out, she could not help putting hers into it; and looking up hardily, she said:

"You know about me, don't you?"

His face, naturally so frank, seemed to clench up, as if he were riding at a fence. 'He'll tell a lie,' she thought bitterly. But he did not.

"Yes, Leila told me."

And she thought: 'I suppose he'll try and pretend that I've not been a beast!'

"I admire your pluck," he said.

"I haven't any."

"We never know ourselves, do we? I suppose you wouldn't walk my pace a minute or two, would you? I'm going the same way."

"I don't know which way I'm going."

"That is my case, too."

They walked on in silence.

"I wish to God I were back in France," said Fort abruptly. "One doesn't feel clean here."

Noel's heart applauded.

Ah! to get away—away from oneself! But at the thought of her baby, her heart fell again. "Is your leg quite hopeless?" she said.

"Quite."

"That must be horrid."

"Hundreds of thousands would look on it as splendid luck; and so it is if you count it better to be alive than dead, which I do, in spite of the blues."

"How is Cousin Leila?"

"Very well. She goes on pegging away at the hospital; she's a brick." But he did not look at her, and again there was silence, till he stopped by Lord's Cricket-ground.

"I mustn't keep you crawling along at this pace."

"Oh, I don't mind!"

"I only wanted to say that if I can be of any service to you at any time in any way whatever, please command me."

He gave her hand a squeeze, took his hat off; and Noel walked slowly on. The little interview, with its suppressions, and its implications, had but exasperated her restlessness, and yet, in a way, it had soothed the soreness of her heart. Captain Fort at all events did not despise her; and he was in trouble like herself. She felt that somehow by the look of his face, and the tone of his voice when he spoke of Leila. She quickened her pace. George's words came back to her: "If you're not ashamed of yourself, no one will be of you!" How easy to say! The old days, her school, the little half grown-up dances she used to go to, when everything was happy. Gone! All gone!

But her meetings with Opinion were not over for the day, for turning again at last into the home Square, tired out by her three hours' ramble, she met an old lady whom she and Gratian had known from babyhood—a handsome dame, the widow of an official, who spent her days, which showed no symptom of declining, in admirable works. Her daughter, the widow of an officer killed at the Marne, was with her, and the two greeted Noel with a shower of cordial questions: So she was back from the country, and was she quite well again? And working at her hospital? And how was her dear father? They had thought him looking very thin and worn. But now Gratian was at home—— How dreadfully the war kept husbands and wives apart! And whose was the dear little baby they had in the house?

"Mine," said Noel, walking straight past them with her head up. In every fibre of her being she could feel the hurt, startled, utterly bewildered looks of those firm friendly persons left there on the pavement behind her; could feel the way they would

gather themselves together, and walk on, perhaps without a word, and then round the corner begin: "What has come to Noel? What did she mean?" And taking the little gold hoop out of her pocket, she flung it with all her might into the Square Garden. The action saved her from a breakdown; and she went in calmly. Lunch was long over, but her father had not gone out, for he met her in the hall and drew her into the dining-room.

"You must eat, my child," he said. And while she was swallowing down what he had caused to be kept back for her, he stood by the hearth in that favourite attitude of his, one foot on the fender, and one hand gripping the mantel-shelf.

"You've got your wish, Daddy," she said dully: "Everybody knows now. I've told Mr. Lauder, and *Monsieur,* and the Dinnafords."

She saw his fingers uncrisp, then grip the shelf again. "I'm glad," he said.

"Aunt Thirza gave me a ring to wear, but I've thrown it away."

"My dearest child," he began, but could not go on, for the quivering of his lips.

"I wanted to say once more, Daddy, that I'm fearfully sorry about you. And I *am* ashamed of myself; I thought I wasn't, but I *am*—only, I think it was cruel, and I'm not penitent to God; and it's no good trying to make me."

Pierson turned and looked at her. For a long time after, she could not get that look out of her memory.

2 §

Jimmy Fort had turned away from Noel feeling particularly wretched. Ever since the day when Leila had told him of the girl's misfortune he had been aware that his liaison had no decent foundation, save a sort of pity. One day, in a queer access of compunction, he had made Leila an offer of marriage. She had refused; and he had respected her the more, realising by the quiver in her voice and the look in her eyes that she refused him, not because she did not love him well enough, but because she was afraid of losing any of his affection. She was a woman of great experience.

To-day he had taken advantage of the luncheon interval to bring her some flowers, with a note to say that he could not come

that evening. Letting himself in with his latch-key, he had carefully put those Japanese azaleas in the bowl "Famille Rose," taking water from her bedroom. Then he had sat down on the divan with his head in his hands.

Though he had rolled so much about the world, he had never had much to do with women. And there was nothing in him of the Frenchman, who takes what life puts in his way as so much enjoyment on the credit side, and accepts the ends of such affairs as they naturally and rather rapidly arrive. It had been a pleasure, and was no longer a pleasure; but this apparently did not dissolve it, or absolve him. He felt himself bound by an obscure but deep instinct to go on pretending that he was not tired of her, so long as she was not tired of him. And he sat there trying to remember any sign, however small, of such a consummation, quite without success. On the contrary, he had even the wretched feeling that if only he *had* loved her, she would have been much more likely to have tired of him by now. For her he was still the unconquered, in spite of his loyal endeavour to seem conquered. He had made a fatal mistake, that evening after the concert at Queen's Hall, to let himself go, on a mixed tide of desire and pity!

His folly came to him with increased poignancy after he had parted from Noel. How could he have been such a base fool, as to have committed himself to Leila on an evening when he had actually been in the company of that child? Was it the vague, unseizable likeness between them which had pushed him over the edge? 'I've been an ass,' he thought; 'a horrible ass. I would always have given every hour I've ever spent with Leila, for one real smile from that girl.'

This sudden sight of Noel after months during which he had tried loyally to forget her existence, and not succeeded at all, made him realise as he never had yet that he was in love with her; so very much in love with her that the thought of Leila was become nauseating. And yet the instincts of a gentleman seemed to forbid him to betray that secret to either of them. It was an accursed coil! He hailed a cab, for he was late; and all the way back to the War Office he continued to see the girl's figure and her face with its short hair. And a fearful temptation rose within him. Was it not *she* who was now the real object for chivalry and pity? Had he not the right to consecrate himself to championship of one in such a deplorable position? Leila had lived her life; but this child's life—pretty well

wrecked—was all before her. And then he grinned from sheer disgust. For he knew that this was Jesuitry. Not chivalry was moving him, but love! Love! Love of the unattainable! And with a heavy heart, indeed, he entered the great building, where, in a small room, companioned by the telephone, and surrounded by sheets of paper covered with figures, he passed his days. The war made everything seem dreary, hopeless. No wonder he had caught at any distraction which came along—caught at it, till it had caught him!

IV

1 §

To find out the worst is, for human nature, only a question of time. But where the "worst" is attached to a family haloed, as it were, by the authority and reputation of an institution like the Church, the process of discovery has to break through many a little hedge. Sheer unlikelihood, genuine respect, the defensive instinct in those identified with an institution, who will themselves feel weaker if its strength be diminished, the feeling that the scandal is too good to be true—all these little hedges, and more, had to be broken through. To the Dinnafords, the unholy importance of what Noel had said to them would have continued to keep them dumb, out of self-protection; but its monstrosity had given them the feeling that there must be some mistake, that the girl had been overtaken by a wild desire to "pull their legs" as dear Charlie would say. With the hope of getting this view confirmed, they lay in wait for the old nurse who took the baby out, and obtained the information, shortly imparted: "Oh, yes; Miss Noel's. Her 'usband was killed—poor lamb!" And they felt rewarded. They had been sure there was some mistake. The relief of hearing that word "'usband" was intense. One of these hasty war marriages, of which the dear Vicar had not approved, and so it had been kept dark. Quite intelligible, but so sad! Enough misgiving however remained in their minds, to prevent their going to condole with the dear Vicar; but not enough to prevent their roundly contradicting the rumours and gossip already coming to their ears. And then one day, when their friend Mrs. Curtis had said too positively: "Well, she doesn't wear a wedding-ring, that I'll swear, because I took very good care to look!" they determined to ask Mr. Lauder. He would—indeed must—know; and, of course, would not tell a story. When they asked him it was so manifest that he *did* know, that they almost withdrew the question. The poor young man had gone the colour of a tomato.

"I prefer not to answer," he said. The rest of a very short interview was passed in exquisite discomfort. Indeed discomfort, exquisite and otherwise, within a few weeks of Noel's re-

turn, had begun to pervade all the habitual congregation of Pierson's church. It was noticed that neither of the two sisters attended Service now. Certain people who went in the sincere hope of seeing Noel, only fell off again when she did not appear. After all, she would not have the face! And Gratian was too ashamed, no doubt. It was constantly remarked that the Vicar looked very grave and thin, even for him. As the rumours hardened into certainty, the feeling towards him became a curious medley of sympathy and condemnation. There was about the whole business that which English people especially resent. By the very fact of his presence before them every Sunday, and his public ministrations, he was exhibiting to them, as it were, the seamed and blushing face of his daughter's private life, besides affording one long and glaring demonstration of the failure of the Church to guide its flock. If a man could not keep his own daughter in the straight path—whom could he? Resign! The word began to be thought about, but not yet spoken. He had been there so long; he had spent so much money on the church and the parish; his gentle dreamy manner was greatly liked. He was a gentleman, and had helped many people; and, though his love of music and vestments had always caused heart-burnings, yet it had given a certain cachet to the church. The women, at any rate, were always glad to know that the church they went to was capable of drawing their fellow women away from other churches. Besides, it was war-time, and moral delinquency which in time of peace would have bulked too large to neglect, was now less insistently dwelt on, by minds preoccupied by food and air-raids. Things, of course, could not go on as they were; but as yet they did go on.

2 §

The talked-about is always the last to hear the talk; and nothing concrete or tangible came Pierson's way. He went about his usual routine without seeming change. And yet there was a change, secret and creeping. Wounded almost to death himself, he felt as though surrounded by one great wound in others; but it was some weeks before anything occurred to rouse within him the weapon of anger or the protective impulse.

And then one day a little swift brutality shook him to the very soul. He was coming home from a long parish round, and had turned into the Square, when a low voice behind him said:

"Wot price the little barstard?"

A cold, sick feeling stifled his very breathing; he gasped, and spun round, to see two big loutish boys walking fast away. With swift and stealthy passion he sprang after them, and putting his hands on their two neighbouring shoulders, wrenched them round so that they faced him, with mouths fallen open in alarm. Shaking them with all his force, he said:

"How dare you—how dare you use that word?" His face and voice must have been rather terrible, for the scare in their faces brought him to sudden consciousness of his own violence, and he dropped his hands. In two seconds they were at the corner. They stopped there for a second; one of them shouted "Gran'pa"; then they vanished. He was left with lips and hands quivering, and a feeling that he had not known for years—the weak white empty feeling one has after yielding utterly to sudden murderous rage. He crossed over, and stood leaning against the Garden railings, with the thought: 'God forgive me! I could have killed them—I could have killed them!' There had been a devil in him. If he had had something in his hand, he might now have been a murderer. How awful! Only one had spoken, but he could have killed them both! And the word was true, and was in all mouths—all low common mouths, day after day, of his own daughter's child! The ghastliness of this thought, brought home so utterly, made him writhe, and grasp the railings as if he would have bent them.

From that day on, a creeping sensation of being rejected of men, never left him; the sense of identification with Noel and her tiny outcast became ever more poignant, more real; the desire to protect them ever more passionate; and the feeling that round about there were whispering voices, pointing fingers, and a growing malevolence was ever more sickening. He was beginning too to realise the deep and hidden truth: How easily the breath of scandal destroys the influence and sanctity of those endowed therewith by vocation; how invaluable it is to feel untarnished, and how difficult to feel that when others think you tarnished.

He tried to be with Noel as much as possible; and in the evenings they sometimes went walks together, without ever talking of what was always in their minds. Between six and eight the girl was giving sittings to Lavendie in the drawing-room, and sometimes Pierson would come there and play to them. He was always possessed now by a sense of the danger Noel ran from

companionship with any man. On three occasions, Jimmy Fort made his appearance after dinner. He had so little to say that it was difficult to understand why he came; but, sharpened by this new dread for his daughter, Pierson noticed his eyes always following her. 'He admires her,' he thought; and often he would try his utmost to grasp the character of this man, who had lived such a roving life. 'Is he—can he be the sort of man I would trust Nollie to?' he would think. 'Oh, that I should have to hope like this that some good man would marry her—my little Nollie, a child only the other day!'

In these sad, painful, lonely weeks he found a spot of something like refuge in Leila's sitting-room, and he would go there often for half an hour when she was back from her hospital. That little black-walled room with its Japanese prints and its flowers, soothed him. And Leila soothed him, innocent as he was of any knowledge of her latest aberration, and perhaps conscious that she herself was not too happy. To watch her arranging flowers, singing her little French songs, or to find her beside him, listening to his confidences, was the only real pleasure he knew in these days. And Leila, in turn, would watch him and think: 'Poor Edward! He has never lived; and never will, now!' But sometimes the thought would shoot through her: 'Perhaps he's to be envied. He doesn't feel what I feel, anyway. Why did I fall in love again?'

They did not speak of Noel as a rule, but one evening she expressed her views roundly.

"It was a great mistake to make Noel come back, Edward. It was Quixotic. You'll be lucky if real mischief doesn't come of it. She's not a patient character; one day she'll do something rash. And, mind you, she'll be much more likely to break out if she sees the world treating you badly than if it happens to herself. I should send her back to the country, before she makes bad worse."

"I can't do that, Leila. We must live it down together."

"Wrong, Edward. You should take things as they are."

With a heavy sigh Pierson answered:

"I wish I could see her future. She's so attractive. And her defences are gone. She's lost faith and belief in all that a good woman should be. The day after she came back she told me she was ashamed of herself. But since—she's not given a sign. She's so proud—my poor little Nollie. I see how men admire her, too. Our Belgian friend is painting her. He's

a good man; but he finds her beautiful, and who can wonder. And your friend Captain Fort. Fathers are supposed to be blind, but they see very clear sometimes."

Leila rose and drew down a blind.

"This sun," she said. "Does Jimmy Fort come to you often?"

"Oh! no; very seldom. But still—I can see."

'You bat—you blunderer!' thought Leila: 'See! You can't even see this beside you!'

"I expect he's sorry for her," she said in a queer voice.

"Why should he be sorry? He doesn't know."

"Oh, yes! He knows; I told him."

"You told him!"

"Yes," Leila repeated stubbornly; "and he's sorry for her."

And even then "this monk" beside her did not see, and went blundering on.

"No, no; it's not merely that he's sorry. By the way he looks at her, I know I'm not mistaken. I've wondered—what do you think, Leila? He's too old for her; but he seems an honourable, kind man."

"Oh! a most honourable, kind man." But only by pressing her hand against her lips had she smothered a burst of bitter laughter. He, who saw nothing, could yet notice Fort's eyes when he looked at Noel, and be positive that he was in love with her! How plainly those eyes must speak! Her control gave way.

"All this is very interesting," she said, spurning her words like Noel, "considering that he's more than my friend, Edward." It gave her a sort of pleasure to see him wince. 'These blind bats!' she thought, terribly stung that he should so clearly assume her out of the running. Then she was sorry, his face had become so still and wistful. And turning away, she said:

"Oh! I shan't break my heart; I'm a good loser. And I'm a good fighter, too; perhaps I shan't lose." And snapping off a sprig of geranium, she pressed it to her lips.

"Forgive me," said Pierson slowly; "I didn't know. I'm stupid. I thought your love for your poor soldiers had left no room for other feelings."

Leila uttered a shrill laugh. "What have they to do with each other? Did you never hear of passion, Edward? Oh! Don't look at me like that. Do you think a woman can't feel

passion at my age? As much as ever, more than ever, because it's all slipping away."

She took her hand from her lips, but a geranium petal was left clinging there, like a bloodstain. "What has your life been all these years," she went on vehemently—"suppression of passion, nothing else! You monks twist Nature up with holy words, and try to disguise what the veriest simpleton can see. Well, *I* haven't suppressed passion, Edward. That's all."

"And are you happier for that?"

"I was; and I shall be again."

A little smile curled Pierson's lips. "Shall be?" he said. "I hope so. It's just two ways of looking at things, Leila."

"Oh, Edward! Don't be so gentle! I suppose you don't think a person like me can ever really love?"

He was standing before her with his head down, and a sense that, naïve and bat-like as he was, there was something in him she could not reach or understand, made her cry out:

"I've not been nice to you. Forgive me, Edward! I'm so unhappy."

"There was a Greek who used to say: 'God is the helping of man by man.' It isn't true, but it's beautiful. Good-bye, dear Leila, and don't be sorrowful."

She squeezed his hand, and turned to the window.

She stood there watching his black figure cross the road in the sunshine, and pass round the corner by the railings of the church. He walked quickly, very upright; there was something unseeing even about that back view of him; or was it that he saw—another world? She had never lost the mental habits of her orthodox girlhood, and in spite of all impatience, recognised his sanctity. When he had disappeared she went into her bedroom. What he had said, indeed, was no discovery. She had known. Oh! She had known. 'Why didn't I accept Jimmy's offer? Why didn't I marry him? Is it too late?' she thought. 'Could I? Would he—even now?' But then she started away from her own thought. Marry him! knowing his heart was with this girl?

She looked long at her face in the mirror, studying with a fearful interest the little hard lines and markings there beneath their light coating of powder. She examined the cunning touches of colouring matter here and there in her front hair. Were they cunning enough? Did they deceive? They seemed to her suddenly to stare out. She fingered and smoothed the

slight looseness and fulness of the skin below her chin. She stretched herself, and passed her hands down over her whole form, searching as it were for slackness, or thickness. And she had the bitter thought: 'I'm all out. I'm doing all I can.' The lines of a little poem Fort had showed her went thrumming through her head:

> "Time, you old gipsy man,
> Will you not stay—
> Put up your caravan
> Just for a day?"

What more could she do? He did not like to see her lips reddened. She had marked his disapprovals, watched him wipe his mouth after a kiss, when he thought she couldn't see him. 'I need not!' she thought. 'Noel's lips are no redder, really. What has she better than I? Youth—dew on the grass!' That didn't last long! But long enough to "do *her* in" as her soldier-men would say. And, suddenly she revolted against herself, against Fort, against this chilled and foggy country; felt a fierce nostalgia for African sun, and the African flowers; the happy-go-lucky, hand-to-mouth existence of those five years before the war began. High Constantia at grape harvest! How many years ago—ten years, eleven years! Ah! To have before her those ten years, *with him!* Ten years in the sun! He would have loved her then, and gone on loving her! And she would not have tired of him, as she had tired of those others. 'In half an hour,' she thought, 'he'll be here, sit opposite me; I shall see him struggling forcing himself to seem affectionate! It's too humbling! But I don't care; I want him!'

She searched her wardrobe, for some garment or touch of colour, novelty of any sort, to help her. But she had tried them all—those little tricks—was bankrupt. And such a discouraged, heavy mood came on her, that she did not even "change," but went back in her nurse's dress and lay down on the divan, pretending to sleep, while the maid set out the supper. She lay there moody and motionless, trying to summon courage, feeling that if she showed herself beaten she was beaten; knowing that she only held him by pity. But when she heard his footstep on the stairs she swiftly passed her hands over her cheeks, as if to press the blood out of them, and lay absolutely still. She hoped that she was white, and indeed she was, with finger-marks under the eyes, for she had suffered greatly this last hour. Through her

lashes she saw him halt, and look at her in surprise. Asleep, or —ill, which? She did not move. She wanted to watch him. He tiptoed across the room and stood looking down at her. There was a furrow between his eyes. 'Ah!' she thought, 'it would suit you, if I were dead, my kind friend.' He bent a little towards her; and she wondered suddenly whether she looked graceful lying there, sorry now that she had not changed her dress. She saw him shrug his shoulders ever so faintly with a puzzled little movement. He had not seen that she was shamming. How nice his face was—not mean, secret, callous! She opened her eyes, which against her will had in them the despair she was feeling. He went on his knees, and lifting her hand to his lips, hid them with it.

"Jimmy," she said gently, "I'm an awful bore to you. Poor Jimmy! No! Don't pretend! I know what I know!" 'Oh, God! What am I saying?' she thought. 'It's fatal—fatal. I ought never——!' And drawing his head to her, she put it to her heart. Then, instinctively aware that this moment had been pressed to its uttermost, she scrambled up, kissed his forehead, stretched herself, and laughed.

"I was asleep, dreaming; dreaming you loved me. Wasn't it funny? Come along. There are oysters, for the last time this season."

All that evening, as if both knew they had been looking over a precipice, they seemed to be treading warily, desperately anxious not to rouse emotion in each other, or touch on things which must bring a scene. And Leila talked incessantly of Africa.

"Don't you long for the sun, Jimmy? Couldn't we—couldn't you go? Oh! why doesn't this wretched war end? All that we've got here at home—every scrap of wealth and comfort, and age, and art, and music, I'd give it all for the light and the sun out there. Wouldn't you?"

And Fort said he would, knowing well of one thing which he would not give. And she knew that, as well as he.

They were both gayer than they had been for a long time; so that when he had gone, she fell back once more on to the divan, and burying her face in a cushion, wept bitterly.

V

1 §

It was not quite disillusionment that Pierson felt while he walked away. Perhaps he had not really believed in Leila's regeneration. It was more an acute discomfort, an increasing loneliness. A soft and restful spot was now denied him; a certain warmth and allurement had gone out of his life. He had not even the feeling that it was his duty to try and save Leila by persuading her to marry Fort. He had always been too sensitive, too much as it were of a gentleman, for the robuster sorts of evangelism. Such delicacy had been a stumbling-block to him all through professional life. In the eight years when his wife was with him, all had been more certain, more direct and simple, with the help of her sympathy, judgment, and companionship. At her death a sort of mist had gathered in his soul. No one had ever spoken plainly to him. To a clergyman, who does? No one had told him in so many words that he should have married again—that to stay unmarried was bad for him, physically and spiritually, fogging and perverting life; not driving him, indeed, as it drove many, to intolerance and cruelty, but to that half-living dreaminess, and the vague unhappy yearnings which so constantly beset him. All these celibate years he had really only been happy in his music, or in far-away country places, taking strong exercise, and losing himself in the beauties of Nature; and since the war began he had only once, for those three days at Kestrel, been out of London.

He walked home, going over in his mind very anxiously all the evidence he had of Fort's feeling for Noel. How many times had he been to them since she came back? Only three times—three evening visits! And he had not been alone with her a single minute! Before this calamity befell his daughter, he would never have observed anything in Fort's demeanour; but, in his new watchfulness, he had seen the almost reverential way he looked at her, noticed the extra softness of his voice when he spoke to her, and once a look of sudden pain, a sort of dulling of his whole self, when Noel had got up and gone

out of the room. And the girl herself? Twice he had surprised her gazing at Fort when he was not looking, with a sort of brooding interest. He remembered how, as a little girl, she would watch a grown-up, and then suddenly one day attach herself to him, and be quite devoted. Yes, he must warn her, before she could possibly become entangled. In his fastidious chastity, the opinion he had held of Fort was suddenly lowered. He, already a free-thinker, was now revealed as a free-liver. Poor little Nollie! Endangered again already! Every man a kind of wolf waiting to pounce on her!

He found Lavendie and Noel in the drawing-room, standing before the portrait which was nearing completion. He looked at it for a long minute, and turned away.

"Don't you think it's like me, Daddy?"

"It's like you; but it hurts me. I can't tell why."

He saw the smile of a painter whose picture is being criticised come on Lavendie's face.

"It is perhaps the colouring which does not please you, *monsieur?*"

"No, no; deeper. The expression; what is she waiting for?"

The defensive smile died on Lavendie's lips.

"It is as I see her, *monsieur le curé.*"

Pierson turned again to the picture, and suddenly covered his eyes. "She looks 'fey,'" he said, and went out of the room.

Lavendie and Noel remained staring at the picture. "Fey? What does that mean, *mademoiselle?*"

"Possessed, or something."

And they continued to stare at the picture, till Lavendie said: "I think there is still a little too much light on that ear."

2 §

The same evening, at bedtime, Pierson called Noel back.

"Nollie, I want you to know something. In all but the name, Captain Fort is a married man."

He saw her flush, and felt his own face darkening with colour.

She said calmly: "I know; to Leila."

"Do you mean she has told you?"

Noel shook her head.

"Then how?"

"I guessed. Daddy, don't treat me as a child any more. What's the use, now?"

He sat down in the chair before the hearth, and covered his face with his hands. By the quivering of those hands, and the movement of his shoulders, she could tell that he was stifling emotion, perhaps even crying; and sinking down on his knees she pressed his hands and face to her, murmuring: "Oh, Daddy dear! Oh, Daddy dear!"

He put his arms around her, and they sat a long time with their cheeks pressed together, not speaking a word.

VI

1 §

The day after that silent outburst of emotion in the drawing-room was a Sunday. And, obeying the longing awakened overnight to be as good as she could to her father, Noel said to him:

"Would you like me to come to Church?"

"Of course, Nollie."

How could he have answered otherwise? To him Church was the home of comfort and absolution, where people must bring their sins and troubles—a haven of sinners, the fount of charity, of forgiveness, and love. Not to have believed that, after all these years, would have been to deny all his usefulness in life, and to cast a slur on the House of God.

And so Noel walked there with him, for Gratian had gone down to George, for the week-end. She slipped quietly up the side aisle to their empty pew, under the pulpit. Never turning her eyes from the chancel, she remained unconscious of the stir her presence made, during that hour and twenty minutes. Behind her, the dumb currents of wonder, disapproval, and resentment ran a stealthy course. On her all eyes were fixed sooner or later, and every mind became the playground of judgments. From every soul, kneeling, standing, or sitting, while the voice of the Service droned, sang, or spoke, a kind of glare radiated on to that one small devoted head, which seemed so ludicrously devout. She disturbed their devotions, this girl who had betrayed her father, her faith, her class. She ought to repent, of course, and Church was the right place; yet there was something brazen in her repenting there before their very eyes; she was too palpable a flaw in the crystal of the Church's authority, too visible a rent in the raiment of their priest. Her figure focussed all the uneasy amazement and heart-searchings of these last weeks. Mothers quivered with the knowledge that their daughters could see her; wives with the idea that their husbands were seeing her. Men experienced sensations varying from condemnation to a sort of covetousness. Young folk wondered, and felt inclined to giggle. Old maids could hardly bear to look. Here and there a man or woman who had seen life face to face, was

simply sorry! The consciousness of all who knew her personally was at stretch how to behave if they came within reach of her in going out. For, though only half a dozen would actually rub shoulders with her, all knew that they might be, and many felt it their duty to be, of that half-dozen, so as to establish their attitude once for all. It was, in fact, too severe a test for human nature and the feelings which Church ought to arouse. The stillness of that young figure, the impossibility of seeing her face and judging her state of mind thereby; finally, a faint lurking shame that they should be so intrigued and disturbed by something which had to do with sex, in this House of Worship—all combined to produce in every mind that herd-feeling of defence, which so soon becomes offensive. And, half unconscious, half aware of it all, Noel stood, and sat, and knelt. Once or twice she saw her father's eyes fixed on her; and, still in the glow of last night's pity and remorse, felt a kind of worship for his thin grave face. But for the most part, her own wore the expression Lavendie had translated to his canvas—the look of one ever waiting for the extreme moments of life, for those few and fleeting poignancies which existence holds for the human heart. A look neither hungry nor dissatisfied, but dreamy and expectant, which might blaze into warmth and depth at any moment, and then go back to its dream.

When the last notes of the organ died away she continued to sit very still, without looking round. There was no second Service, and the congregation melted out behind her, and had dispersed into the streets and squares long before she came forth. After hesitating whether or no to go to the vestry door, she turned away and walked home alone.

It was this deliberate evasion of all contact which probably clinched the business. The absence of vent, of any escape-pipe for the feelings, is always dangerous. They felt cheated. If Noel had come out amongst all those whose devotions her presence had disturbed, if in that exit, some had shown the others had witnessed one knows not what of a manifested ostracism, the outraged sense of social decency might have been appeased and sleeping dogs allowed to lie, for we soon get used to things; and, after all, the war took precedence in every mind even over social decency. But none of this had occurred, and a sense that Sunday after Sunday the same little outrage would happen to them, moved more than a dozen quite unrelated persons, and caused the posting that evening of as many letters, signed and

unsigned, to a certain quarter. London is no place for parish conspiracy, and a situation which in the country would have provoked meetings more or less public, and possibly a resolution, could perhaps only thus be dealt with. Besides, in certain folk there is ever a mysterious itch to write an unsigned letter—such missives satisfy some obscure sense of justice, some uncontrollable longing to get even with those who have hurt or disturbed them, without affording the offenders chance for further hurt or disturbance.

Letters which are posted often reach their destination.

§ 2 §

On Wednesday morning Pierson was sitting in his study at the hour devoted to the calls of his parishioners, when the maid announced, "Canon Rushbourne, sir," and he saw before him an old College friend whom he had met but seldom in recent years. His visitor was a short, grey-haired man of rather portly figure, whose round, rosy, good-humoured face had a look of sober goodness, and whose light-blue eyes shone a little. He grasped Pierson's hand, and said in a voice to whose natural heavy resonance professional duty had added a certain unction:

"My dear Edward, how many years it is since we met! Do you remember dear old Blakeway? I saw him only yesterday. He's just the same. I'm delighted to see you again," and he laughed a little soft nervous laugh. Then for a few moments he talked of the war and old College days, and Pierson looked at him and thought: 'What has he come for?'

"You've something to say to me, Alec," he said, at last.

Canon Rushbourne leaned forward in his chair, and answered with evident effort: "Yes; I wanted to have a little talk with you, Edward. I hope you won't mind. I do hope you won't."

"Why should I mind?"

Canon Rushbourne's eyes shone more than ever, there was real friendliness in his face.

"I know you've every right to say to me: 'Mind your own business.' But I made up my mind to come as a friend, hoping to save you from—er——" he stammered, and began again. "I think you ought to know of the feeling in your parish that—er—that—er—your position is very delicate. Without breach of confidence I may tell you that letters have been sent to headquarters; you can imagine perhaps what I mean. Do believe,

my dear friend, that I'm actuated by my old affection for you; nothing else, I do assure you."

In the silence, his breathing could be heard, as of a man a little touched with asthma, while he continually smoothed his thick black knees, his whole face radiating an anxious kindliness. The sun shone brightly on those two black figures, so very different, and drew out of their well-worn garments the faint latent green mossiness which underlies the clothes of clergymen.

At last Pierson said: "Thank you, Alec; I understand."

The Canon uttered a resounding sigh. "You didn't realise how very easily people misinterpret her being here with you; it seems to them a kind—a kind of challenge. They were bound, I think, to feel that; and I'm afraid, in consequence——" He stopped, moved by the fact that Pierson had closed his eyes.

"I am to choose, you mean, between my daughter and my parish?"

The Canon seemed, with a stammer of words, to try and blunt the edge of that clear question.

"My visit is quite informal, my dear fellow; I can't say at all. But there is evidently much feeling; that is what I wanted you to know. You haven't quite seen, I think, that——"

Pierson raised his hand. "I can't talk of this."

The Canon rose. "Believe me, Edward, I sympathise deeply. I felt I had to warn you." He held out his hand. "Good-bye, my dear friend, do forgive me"; and he went out. In the hall an adventure befell him so plump, and awkward, that he could barely recite it to Mrs. Rushbourne that night.

"Coming out from my poor friend," he said, "I ran into a baby's perambulator and that young mother, whom I remember as a little thing"—he held his hand at the level of his thigh—"arranging it for going out. It startled me; and I fear I asked quite foolishly: 'Is it a boy?' The poor young thing looked up at me. She has very large eyes, quite beautiful, strange eyes. 'Have you been speaking to Daddy about me?' 'My dear young lady,' I said, 'I'm such an old friend, you see. You must forgive me.' And then she said: 'Are they going to ask him to resign?' 'That depends on you,' I said. Why do I say these things, Charlotte? I ought simply to have held my tongue. Poor young thing; so very young! And the little baby!"

"She has brought it on herself, Alec," Mrs. Rushbourne replied.

VII

1 §

The moment his visitor had vanished, Pierson paced up and down the study, with anger rising in his heart. His daughter or his parish! The old saw, "An Englishman's house is his castle!" was being attacked within him. Must he not then harbour his own daughter, and help her by candid atonement to regain her inward strength and peace? Was he not thereby acting as a true Christian, in by far the hardest course he and she could pursue? To go back on that decision and imperil his daughter's spirit, or else resign his parish—the alternatives were brutal! This was the centre of his world, the only spot where so lonely a man could hope to feel even the semblance of home; a thousand little threads tethered him to his church, his parishioners, and this house—for, to live on here if he gave up his church was out of the question. But his chief feeling was a bewildered anger that for doing what seemed to him his duty, he should be attacked by his parishioners.

A passion of desire to know what they really thought and felt —these parishioners of his, whom he had befriended, and for whom he had worked so long—beset him now, and he went out. But the absurdity of his quest struck him before he had gone the length of the Square. One could not go to people and say: "Stand and deliver me your inmost judgments." And suddenly he was aware of how far away he really was from them. Through all his ministrations had he ever come to know their hearts? And now, in this dire necessity for knowledge, there seemed no way of getting it. He went at random into a stationer's shop; the shopman sang bass in his choir. They had met Sunday after Sunday for the last seven years. But when, with this itch for intimate knowledge on him, he saw the man behind the counter, it was as if he were looking on him for the first time. The Russian proverb, "The heart of another is a dark forest," flashed into his mind, while he said:

"Well, Hodson, what news of your son?"

"Nothing more, Mr. Pierson, thank you, sir, nothing more at present."

And it seemed to Pierson, gazing at the man's face clothed in a short, grizzling beard cut rather like his own, that he must be thinking: 'Ah! sir, but what news of your daughter?' No one would ever tell him to his face what he was thinking. And buying two pencils, he went out. On the other side of the road was a bird-fancier's shop, kept by a woman whose husband had been taken for the Army. She was not friendly towards him, for it was known to her that he had expostulated with her husband for keeping larks, and other wild birds. And quite deliberately he crossed the road, and stood looking in at the window, with the morbid hope that from this unfriendly one he might hear the truth. She was in her shop, and came to the door.

"Have you any news of your husband, Mrs. Cherry?"

"No, Mr. Pierson, I 'ave not; not this week."

"He hasn't gone out yet?"

"No, Mr. Pierson; 'e 'as not."

There was no expression on her face, perfectly blank it was—Pierson had a mad longing to say: 'For God's sake, woman, speak out what's in your mind; tell me what you think of me and my daughter! Never mind my cloth!' But he could no more say it than the woman could tell him what was in her mind. And with a "Good morning" he passed on. No man or woman would tell him anything, unless, perhaps, they were drunk. He came to a public house, and for a moment even hesitated before it, but the thought of insult aimed at Noel stopped him, and he passed that too. And then reality made itself known to him. Though he had come out to hear what they were thinking, he did not really want to hear it, could not endure it if he did. He had been too long immune from criticism, too long in the position of one who may tell others what he thinks of them. And standing there in the crowded street, he was attacked by that longing for the country which had always come on him when he was hard pressed. He looked at his memoranda. By stupendous luck it was almost a blank day. An omnibus passed close by which would take him far out. He climbed on to it, and travelled as far as Hendon; then getting down, set forth on foot. It was bright and hot, and the May blossom in full foam. He walked fast along the perfectly straight road till he came to the top of Elstree Hill. There for a few moments he stood gazing at the school chapel, the cricket-field, the wide land beyond. All was very quiet, for it was lunch-time. A horse was

tethered there, and a strolling cat, as though struck by the tall black incongruity of his figure, paused in her progress, then, slithering under the wicket gate, arched her back and rubbed herself against his leg, crinkling and waving the tip of her tail. Pierson bent down and stroked the creature's head; but uttering a faint miaou, the cat stepped daintily across the road, Pierson too stepped on, past the village, and down over the stile, into a field path. At the edge of the young clover, under a bank of hawthorn, he lay down on his back, with his hat beside him and his arms crossed over his chest, like the effigy of some crusader one may see carved on an old tomb. Though he lay quiet as that old knight, his eyes were not closed, but fixed on the blue, where a lark was singing. Its song refreshed his spirit; its passionate light-heartedness stirred all the love of beauty in him, awoke revolt against a world so murderous and uncharitable. Oh! to pass up with that song into a land of bright spirits, where was nothing ugly, hard, merciless, and the gentle face of the Saviour radiated everlasting love! The scent of the mayflowers, borne down by the sunshine, drenched his senses; he closed his eyes, and, at once, as if resenting that momentary escape, his mind resumed debate with startling intensity. This matter went to the very well-springs, had a terrible and secret significance. If to act as conscience bade him rendered him unfit to keep his parish, all was built on sand, had no deep reality, was but rooted in convention. Charity, and the forgiveness of sins honestly atoned for—what became of them? Either *he* was wrong to have espoused straightforward confession and atonement for her, or *they* were wrong chasing him from that espousal. There could be no making those extremes to meet. But if he were wrong, having done the hardest thing already—where could he turn? His Church stood bankrupt of ideals. He felt as if pushed over the edge of the world, with feet on space, and head in some binding cloud. 'I cannot have been wrong,' he thought; 'any other course was so much easier. I sacrificed my pride, and my poor girl's pride; I would have loved to let her run away. If for this we are to be stoned and cast forth, what living force is there in the religion I have loved; what does it all come to? Have I served a sham? I cannot and will not believe it. Something is wrong with me, something is wrong—but where—what?' He rolled over, lay on his face, and prayed. He prayed for guidance and deliverance from the gusts of anger which kept sweeping over him; even more for relief from the feeling of personal out-

rage, and the unfairness of this thing. He had striven to be loyal to what he thought the right, had sacrificed all his sensitiveness, all his secret fastidious pride in his child and himself. For that he was to be thrown out! Whether through prayer, or in the scent and feel of the clover, he found presently a certain rest. Away in the distance he could see the spire of Harrow Church. The Church! No! *She* was not, could not be, at fault. The fault was in himself. 'I am unpractical,' he thought. 'It is so, I know. Agnes used to say so, Bob and Thirza think so. They all think me unpractical and dreamy. Is it a sin—I wonder?' There were lambs in the next field; he watched their gambollings, and his heart relaxed; brushing the clover dust off his black clothes, he began to retrace his steps. The boys were playing cricket now, and he stood a few minutes watching them. He had not seen cricket played since the war began; it seemed almost other-worldly, with the click of the bats, and the shrill young voices, under the distant drone of that sky-hornet threshing along to Hendon. A boy made a good leg hit. "Well played!" he called. Then, suddenly conscious of his own incongruity and strangeness in that green spot, he turned away on the road back to London. To resign; to await events; to send Noel away—of those three courses, the last alone seemed impossible. 'Am I really so far from them,' he thought, 'that they can wish me to go, for this? If so, I had better go. It will be just another failure. But I won't believe it yet; I can't believe it.'

The heat was sweltering, and he became very tired before at last he reached his omnibus, and could sit with the breeze cooling his hot face. He did not reach home till six, having eaten nothing since breakfast. Intending to have a bath and lie down till dinner, he went upstairs.

Unwonted silence reigned. He tapped on the nursery door. It was deserted; he passed through to Noel's room; but that too was empty. The wardrobe stood open as if it had been hastily ransacked, and her dressing-table was bare. In alarm he went to the bell and pulled it sharply. The old-fashioned ring of it jingled far below. The parlour-maid came up.

"Where are Miss Noel and Nurse, Susan?"

"I didn't know you were in, sir. Miss Noel left me this note to give you. They—I——"

Pierson stopped her with his hand. "Thank you, Susan; get me some tea, please." With the note unopened in his hand,

he waited till she was gone. His head was going round, and he sat down on the side of Noel's bed to read:

"Darling Daddy,

"The man who came this morning told me of what is going to happen. I simply won't have it. I'm sending Nurse and baby down to Kestrel at once, and going to Leila's for the night, until I've made up my mind what to do. I knew it was a mistake my coming back. I don't care what happens to me, but I won't have you hurt. I think it's hateful of people to try and injure you for my fault. I've had to borrow money from Susan—six pounds. Oh! Daddy Dear, forgive me.

"Your loving

"Nollie."

He read it with unutterable relief; at all events he knew where she was—poor, wilful, rushing, loving-hearted child; knew where she was, and could get at her. After his bath and some tea, he would go to Leila's and bring her back. Poor little Nollie, thinking that by just leaving his house she could settle this deep matter! He did not hurry, feeling decidedly exhausted, and it was nearly eight before he set out, leaving a message for Gratian, who did not as a rule come in from her hospital till past nine.

The day was still glowing, and now, in the cool of evening, his refreshed senses soaked up its beauty. 'God has so made this world,' he thought 'that, no matter what our struggles and sufferings, it's ever a joy to live when the sun shines, or the moon is bright, or the night starry. Even we can't spoil it.' In Regent's Park the lilacs and laburnums were still in bloom though June had come, and he gazed at them in passing, as a lover might at his lady. His conscience pricked him suddenly. Mrs. Mitchett and the dark-eyed girl she had brought to him on New Year's Eve, the very night he had learned of his own daughter's tragedy—had he ever thought of them since? How had *that* poor girl fared? He had been too impatient of her impenetrable mood. What did he know of the hearts of others, when he did not even know his own, could not rule his feelings of anger and revolt, had not guided his own daughter into the waters of safety! And Leila! Had he not been too censorious in thought? How powerful, how strange was this instinct of sex, which hovered and swooped on lives, seized them, bore them away, then

dropped them exhausted and defenceless! Some munition-wagons, painted a dull grey, lumbered past, driven by sunburned youths in drab. Life-force, Death-force—was it all one; the great unknowable momentum from which there was but the one escape, in the arms of their Heavenly Father? Blake's little old stanzas came into his mind:

> "And we are put on earth a little space,
> That we may learn to bear the beams of love;
> And these black bodies and this sunburnt face
> Are but a cloud, and like a shady grove.
>
> "For when our souls have learned the heat to bear,
> The cloud will vanish, we shall hear His voice,
> Saying: Come out from the grove, my love and care,
> And round my golden tent like lambs rejoice!"

Learned the heat to bear! Those lambs he had watched in a field that afternoon, their sudden little leaps and rushes, their funny quivering wriggling tails, their tiny nuzzling black snouts —what little miracles of careless joy among the meadows flowers! Lambs, and flowers, and sunlight! Famine, lust, and the great grey guns! A maze, a wilderness; and but for faith, what issue, what path for man to take which did not keep him wandering hopeless, in its thicket? 'God preserve our faith in love, in charity, and the life to come!' he thought. And a blind man with a dog, to whose neck was tied a little deep dish for pennies, ground a hurdy-gurdy as he passed. Pierson put a shilling in the dish. The man stopped playing, his whitish eyes looked up. "Thank you kindly, sir, I'll go home now. Come on, Dick!" He tapped his way round the corner, with his dog straining in front. A blackbird hidden among the blossoms of an acacia, burst into evening song, and another great grey munition-wagon rumbled out through the Park gate.

2 §

The Church-clock was striking nine when he reached Leila's flat, went up, and knocked. Sounds from a piano ceased; the door was opened by Noel. She recoiled when she saw who it was, and said:

"Why did you come, Daddy? It was much better not."

"Are you alone here?"

"Yes; Leila gave me her key. She has to be at the hospital till ten to-night."

"You must come home with me, my dear."

Noel closed the piano, and sat down on the divan. Her face had the same expression as when he had told her that she could not marry Cyril Morland.

"Come, Nollie," he said; "don't be unreasonable. We must see this through together."

"No."

"My dear, that's childish. Do you think the mere accident of your being or not being at home can affect my decision as to what my duty is?"

"Yes; it's my being there that matters. Those people don't care, so long as it isn't an open scandal."

"Nollie!"

"But it is so, Daddy. Of course it's so, and you know it. If I'm away they'll just pity you for having a bad daughter. And quite right too. I am a bad daughter."

Pierson smiled. "Just like when you were a tiny."

"I wish I were a tiny again, or ten years older. It's this *half* age—— But I'm not coming back with you, Daddy; so it's no good."

Pierson sat down beside her.

"I've been thinking this over all day," he said quietly. "Perhaps in my pride I made a mistake when I first knew of your trouble. Perhaps I ought to have accepted the consequences of my failure, then, and have given up, and taken you away at once. After all, if a man is not fit to have the care of souls, he should have the grace to know it."

"But you *are* fit," cried Noel passionately; "Daddy, you *are* fit!"

"I'm afraid not. There is something wanting in me, I don't know exactly what; but something very wanting."

"There isn't. It's only that you're too good—that's why!"

Pierson shook his head. "Don't, Nollie!"

"I will," cried Noel. "You're too gentle, and you're too good. You're charitable, and you're simple, and you believe in another world; that's what's the matter with you, Daddy. Do you think *they* do, these people who want to chase us out? They don't even begin to believe, whatever they say or think. I hate them, and sometimes I hate the Church; either it's hard and narrow, or else it's worldly." She stopped at the expression on her

father's face, the most strange look of pain, and horror, as if an unspoken treachery of his own had been dragged forth for his inspection.

"You're talking wildly," he said, but his lips were trembling. "You mustn't say things like that; they're blasphemous and wicked."

Noel bit her lips, sitting very stiff and still, against a high blue cushion. Then she burst out again:

"You've slaved for those people years and years, and you've had no pleasure and you've had no love; and they wouldn't care *that* if you broke your heart. They don't care for anything, so long as it all seems proper. Daddy, if you let them hurt you, I won't forgive you!"

"And what if *you* hurt me now, Nollie?"

Noel pressed his hand against her warm cheek.

"Oh, no! Oh, no! I don't—I won't. Not again. I've done that already."

"Very well, my dear! then come home with me, and we'll see what's best to be done. It can't be settled by running away."

Noel dropped his hand. "No. Twice I've done what you wanted, and it's been a mistake. If I hadn't gone to Church on Sunday to please you, perhaps it would never have come to this. You don't *see* things, Daddy. I could tell, though I was sitting right in front. I knew what their faces were like, and what they were thinking."

"One must do right, Nollie, and not mind."

"Yes, but what is right? It's not right for me to hurt you, and I'm not going to."

Pierson understood all at once that it was useless to try and move her.

"What are you going to do, then?"

"I suppose I shall go to Kestrel to-morrow. Auntie will have me, I know; I shall talk to Leila."

"Whatever you do, promise to let me know."

Noel nodded.

"Daddy, you look awfully, awfully tired. I'm going to give you some medicine." She went to a little three-cornered cupboard, and bent down. Medicine! The medicine he wanted was not for the body; knowledge of what his duty was—that alone could heal him!

The loud popping of a cork roused him. "What are you doing, Nollie?"

Noel rose with a flushed face, holding in one hand a glass of champagne, in the other a biscuit.

"You're to take this; and I'm going to have some myself."

"My dear," said Pierson bewildered; "it's not yours."

"Drink it, Daddy! Don't you know that Leila would never forgive me if I let you go home looking like that. Besides, she told me I was to eat. Drink it. You can send her a nice present. Drink it!" And she stamped her foot.

Pierson took the glass, and sat there nibbling and sipping. It was nice, very! He had not quite realised how much he needed food and drink. Noel returned from the cupboard a second time; she too had a glass and a biscuit.

"There, you look better already. Now you're to go home at once, in a cab if you can get one; and tell Gratian to make you feed up, or you won't have a body at all; you can't do your duty if you haven't one, you know."

Pierson smiled, and finished the champagne.

Noel took the glass from him. "You're my child to-night, and I'm going to send you to bed. Don't worry, Daddy; it'll all come right." And, taking his arm, she went downstairs with him, and blew him a kiss from the doorway.

He walked away in a sort of dream. Daylight was not quite gone, but the moon was up, just past its full, and the search-lights had begun their nightly wanderings. It was a sky of ghosts and shadows, fitting to the thought which came to him. The finger of Providence was in all this, perhaps! Why should he not go out to France! At last; why not? Some better man, who understood men's hearts, who knew the world, would take his place; and he could go where death made all things simple, and he could not fail. He walked faster and faster, full of an intoxicating relief. Thirza and Gratian would take care of Nollie far better than he. Yes, surely it was ordained! Moonlight had the town now; and all was steel-blue, the very air steel-blue; a dream-city of marvellous beauty, through which he passed, exalted. Soon he would be where that poor boy, and a million others, had given their lives; with the mud and the shells and the scarred grey ground, and the jagged trees, where Christ was daily crucified—there where he had so often longed to be these three years past. It was ordained!

And two women whom he met looked at each other when he had gone by, and those words 'the blighted crow' which they had been about to speak, died on their lips.

VIII

Noel felt light-hearted too, as if she had won a victory. She found some potted meat, spread it on another biscuit, ate it greedily, and finished the pint bottle of champagne. Then she hunted for the cigarettes, and sat down at the piano. She played old tunes—"There is a Tavern in the Town," "Once I Loved a Maiden Fair," "Mowing the Barley," "Clementine," "Lowlands," and sang to them such words as she remembered. There was a delicious running in her veins, and once she got up and danced. She was kneeling at the window, looking out, when she heard the door open, and without getting up, cried out:

"Isn't it a gorgeous night! I've had Daddy here. I gave him some of your champagne, and drank the rest——" then was conscious of a figure far too tall for Leila, and a man's voice saying:

"I'm awfully sorry. It's only I, Jimmy Fort."

Noel scrambled up. "Leila isn't in; but she will be directly—it's past ten."

He was standing stock-still in the middle of the room.

"Won't you sit down? Oh! and won't you have a cigarette?"

"Thanks."

By the flash of his briquette she saw his face clearly; the look on it filled her with a sort of malicious glee.

"I'm going now," she said. "Would you mind telling Leila that I found I couldn't stop?" She made towards the divan to get her hat. When she had put it on, she found him standing just in front of her.

"Noel—if you don't mind me calling you that?"

"Not a bit."

"Don't go; I'm going myself."

"Oh, no! Not for worlds." She tried to slip past, but he took hold of her wrist.

"Please; just one minute!"

Noel stayed motionless, looking at him, while his hand still held her wrist. He said quietly:

"Do you mind telling me why you came here?"

"Oh, just to see Leila."

"Things have come to a head at home, haven't they?"

Noel shrugged her shoulders.

"You came for refuge, didn't you?"

"From whom?"

"Don't be angry; from the need of hurting your father."

She nodded.

"I knew it would come to that. What are you going to do?"

"Enjoy myself." She was saying something fatuous, yet she meant it.

"That's absurd. Don't be angry! You're quite right. Only, you must begin at the right end, mustn't you? Sit down!"

Noel tried to free her wrist.

"No; sit down, please."

Noel sat down; but as he loosed her wrist, she laughed. This was where he sat with Leila, where they would sit when she was gone. "It's awfully funny, isn't it?" she said.

"Funny?" he muttered savagely. "Most things are, in this funny world."

The sound of a taxi stopping not far off had come to her ears, and she gathered her feet under her, planting them firmly. If she sprang up, could she slip by him before he caught her arm again, and get that taxi?

"If I go now," he said, "will you promise me to stop till you've seen Leila?"

"No."

"That's foolish. Come, promise!"

Noel shook her head. She felt a perverse pleasure at his embarrassment.

"Leila's lucky, isn't she? No children, no husband, no father, no anything. Lovely!"

She saw his arm go up as if to ward off a blow. "Poor Leila!" he said.

"Why are you sorry for her? She has freedom! And she has *you!*"

She knew it would hurt; but she wanted to hurt him.

"You needn't envy her for that."

He had just spoken, when Noel saw a figure over by the door.

She jumped up, and said breathlessly:

"Oh, here you are, Leila! Father's been here, and we've had some of your champagne!"

"Capital! You *are* in the dark!"

Noel felt the blood rush into her cheeks. The light leaped up, and Leila came forward. She looked extremely pale, calm, and

self-contained, in her nurse's dress; her full lips were tightly pressed together, but Noel could see her breast heaving violently. A turmoil of shame and wounded pride began raging in the girl. Why had she not flown long ago? Why had she let herself be trapped like this? Leila would think she had been making up to him! Horrible! Disgusting! What didn't he—why didn't some one, speak? Then Leila said:

"I didn't expect you, Jimmy; I'm glad you haven't been dull. Noel is staying here to-night. Give me a cigarette. Sit down, both of you. I'm awfully tired!"

She sank into a chair, leaning back, with her knees crossed; and at that moment Noel admired her. She had said it beautifully; she looked so calm. Fort was lighting her cigarette; his hand was shaking, his face all sorry and mortified.

"Give Noel one, too, and draw the curtains, Jimmy. Quick! Not that it makes any difference; it's as light as day. Sit down, dear."

But Noel remained standing.

"What have you been talking of? Love and Chinese lanterns, or only me?"

At those words Fort, who was drawing the last curtain, turned round; his tall figure was poised awkwardly against the wall, his face, unsuited to diplomacy, had a look of flesh being beaten. If weals had started up across it, Noel would not have been surprised.

He said with painful slowness:

"I don't exactly know; we had hardly begun, had we?"

"The night is young," said Leila. "Go on while I just take off my things."

She rose with the cigarette between her lips, and went into the inner room. In passing, she gave Noel a look. What there was in that look, the girl could never make clear even to herself. Perhaps a creature shot would gaze like that, with a sort of profound and distant questioning, reproach, and anger, with a sort of pride, and the quiver of death. As the door closed, Fort came right across the room.

"Go to her," cried Noel; "she wants you. Can't you see, she wants you?"

And before he could move, she was at the door. She flew downstairs, and out into the moonlight. The taxi, a little way off, was just beginning to move away; she ran towards it, calling out:

"Anywhere! Piccadilly!" and jumping in, blotted herself against the cushions in the far corner.

She did not come to herself, as it were, for several minutes, and then feeling she could no longer bear the cab, stopped it, and got out. Where was she? Bond Street! She began, idly, wandering down its narrow length; the fullest street by day, the emptiest by night. Oh! it had been horrible! Nothing said by any of them—nothing, and yet everything dragged out—of him, of Leila, of herself! She seemed to have no pride or decency left, as if she had been caught stealing. All her happy exhilaration was gone, leaving a miserable recklessness. Nothing she did was right, nothing turned out well, so what did it all matter? The moonlight flooding down between the tall houses gave her a peculiar heady feeling. "Fey" her father had called her. She laughed. 'But I'm not going home,' she thought. Bored with the street's length, she turned off, and was suddenly in Hanover Square. There was the Church, grey-white, where she had been bridesmaid to a second cousin, when she was fifteen. She seemed to see it all again—her frock, the lilies in her hand, the surplices of the choir, the bride's dress, all moonlight-coloured, and unreal. 'I wonder what's become of her!' she thought. 'He's dead, I expect, like Cyril!' She saw her father's face as he was marrying them, heard his voice: "For better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, till death do you part." And the moonlight on the Church seemed to shift and quiver—some pigeons perhaps had been disturbed up there. Then instead of that wedding vision, she saw Monsieur Bara, sitting on his chair, gazing at the floor, and Chica nursing her doll. "All mad, *mademoiselle,* a little mad. Millions of men with white souls, but all a little tiny bit mad, you know." Then Leila's face came before her, with that look in her eyes. She felt again the hot clasp of Fort's fingers on her wrist, and walked on, rubbing it with the other hand. She turned into Regent Street. The wide curve of the Quadrant swept into a sky of unreal blue, and the orange-shaded lamps merely added to the unreality. 'Love and Chinese lanterns! I should like some coffee,' she thought suddenly. She was quite close to the place where Lavendie had taken her. Should she go in there? Why not? She must go somewhere. She turned into the revolving cage of glass. But no sooner was she imprisoned there than in a flash Lavendie's face of disgust; and the red-lipped women, the green stuff that smelled of peppermint came back,

filling her with a rush of dismay. She made the full circle in the revolving cage, and came out into the street again with a laugh. A tall young man in khaki stood there. "Hallo!" he said. "Come in and dance!" She started, recoiled from him and began to walk away as fast as ever she could. She passed a woman whose eyes seemed to scorch her. A woman like a swift vision of ruin with those eyes, and thickly powdered cheeks, and loose red mouth. Noel shuddered and fled along, feeling that her only safety lay in speed. But she could not walk about all night. There would be no train for Kestrel till the morning. —and did she really want to go there, and eat her heart out? Suddenly she thought of George. Why should she not go down to him? He would know what was best for her to do. At the foot of the steps below the Waterloo Column she stood still. All was quiet there and empty, the great buildings whitened, the trees blurred and blue; and sweeter air was coming across their flowering tops. The queer "fey" moony sensations was still with her; so that she felt small and light, as if she could have floated through a ring. Faint rims of light showed round the windows of the Admiralty. The war! However lovely the night, however sweet the lilac smelt—that never stopped! She turned away and passed out under the arch, making for the station. The train of the wounded had just come in, and she stood in the cheering crowd watching the ambulances run out. Tears of excited emotion filled her eyes, and trickled down. Steady, smooth, grey, one after the other they came gliding, with a little burst of cheers greeting each one. All were gone now, and she could pass in. She went to the buffet and got a large cup of coffee, and a bun. Then, having noted the time of her early morning train, she sought the ladies' waiting-room, and sitting down in a corner, took out her purse and counted her money. Two pounds fifteen—enough to go to the hotel, if she liked. But, without luggage—it was so conspicuous, and she could sleep in this corner, all right, if she wanted. What did girls do who had no money, and no friends to go to? Tucked away in the corner of that empty, heavy, varnished room, she seemed to see the cruelty and hardness of life as she had never before seen it, not even when facing her confinement. How lucky she had been, and was! Everyone was good to her. She had no real want or dangers, to face. But, for women—yes, and men too—who had no one to fall back on, nothing but their own hands and health and luck, it must be awful. That girl whose eyes had scorched

her—perhaps she had no one—nothing. And people who were born ill, and the millions of poor women, like those whom she had gone visiting with Gratian sometimes in the poorer streets of her father's parish—for the first time she seemed to really know and feel the sorts of lives they led. And then, Leila's face came back to her once more—Leila whom she had robbed. And the worst of it was, that, alongside her remorseful sympathy, she felt a sort of satisfaction. She could not help his not loving Leila, she could not help it if he loved herself! And he did—she knew it! To feel that anyone loved her was so comforting. But it was all awful! And she—the cause of it! And yet—she had never done or said anything to attract him. No! She could not have helped it.

She had begun to feel drowsy, and closed her eyes. And gradually there came on her a cosey sensation, as if she were leaning up against someone with her head tucked in against his shoulder, as she had so often leaned as a child against her father, coming back from some long darkening drive in Wales or Scotland. She seemed even to feel the wet soft Westerly air on her face and eyelids, and to sniff the scent of a frieze coat; to hear the jog of hoofs and the rolling of the wheels; to feel the closing in of the darkness. Then, so dimly and drowsily, she seemed to know that it was not her father, but someone—someone—then no more, no more at all.

IX

She was awakened by the scream of an engine, and looked around her amazed. Her neck had fallen sideways while she slept, and felt horridly stiff; her head ached, and she was shivering. She saw by the clock that it was past five. 'If only I could get some tea!' she thought. 'Anyway I won't stay here any longer!' When she had washed, and rubbed some of the stiffness out of her neck, the tea renewed her sense of adventure wonderfully. Her train did not start for an hour; she had time for a walk, to warm herself, and went down to the river. There was an early haze, and all looked a little mysterious; but people were already passing on their way to work. She walked along, looking at the water flowing up under the bright mist to which the gulls gave a sort of hovering life. She went as fas as Blackfriars Bridge, and turning back, sat down on a bench under a plane-tree, just as the sun broke through. A little pasty woman with a pinched yellowish face was already sitting there, so still, and seeming to see so little, that Noel wondered of what she could be thinking. While she watched, the woman's face began puckering, and tears rolled slowly down, trickling from pucker to pucker, till, summoning up her courage, Noel sidled nearer, and said:

"Oh! What's the matter?"

The tears seemed to stop from sheer surprise; little grey eyes gazed round, patient little eyes from above an almost bridgeless nose.

"I 'ad a baby. It's dead . . . its father's dead in France . . . I was goin' in the water, but I didn't like the look of it, and now I never will."

That "Now I never will," moved Noel terribly. She slid her arm along the back of the bench and clasped the skinniest of shoulders.

"Don't cry!"

"It was my first. I'm thirty-eight. I'll never 'ave another. Oh! Why didn't I go in the water?"

The face puckered again, and the squeezed-out tears ran down. 'Of course she must cry,' thought Noel; 'cry and cry till it feels

better.' And she stroked the shoulder of the little woman, whose emotion was disengaging the scent of old clothes.

"The father of *my* baby was killed in France, too," she said at last. The little sad grey eyes looked curiously round.

"Was 'e? 'Ave you got your baby still?"

"Yes, oh, yes!"

"I'm glad of that. It 'urts so bad, it does. I'd rather lose me 'usband than me baby, any day." The sun was shining now on a cheek of that terribly patient face; its brightness seemed cruel perching there.

"Can I do anything to help you?" Noel murmured.

"No, thank you, miss. I'm goin' 'ome now. I don't live far. Thank you kindly." And raising her eyes for one more of those half-bewildered looks, she moved away along the Embankment wall. When she was out of sight, Noel walked back to the station. The train was in, and she took her seat. She had three fellow passengers, all in khaki; very silent and moody, as men are when they have to get up early. One was tall, dark, and perhaps thirty-five; the second small, and about fifty, with cropped, scanty grey hair; the third was of medium height and quite sixty-five, with a long row of little coloured patches on his tunic, and a bald, narrow, well-shaped head, grey hair brushed back at the sides, and the thin, collected features and drooping moustache of the old school. It was at him that Noel looked. When he glanced out of the window, or otherwise retired within himself, she liked his face; but when he turned to the ticket-collector or spoke to the others, she did not like it half so much. It was as if the old fellow had two selves, one of which he used when alone, the other in which he dressed every morning to meet the world. They had begun to talk about some Tribunal on which they had to sit. Noel did not listen, but a word or two carried to her now and then.

"How many to-day?" she heard the old fellow ask, and the little cropped man answering: "Hundred and fourteen."

Fresh from the sight of the poor little shabby woman and her grief, she could not help a sort of shrinking from that trim old soldier, with his thin, regular face, who held the fate of a "Hundred and fourteen" in his firm, narrow grasp, perhaps every day. Would he understand their troubles or wants? Of course he wouldn't! Then she saw him looking at her critically with his keen eyes. If he had known her secret, he would be thinking: 'A lady and act like that! Oh, no! Quite—quite

out of the question!' And she felt as if she could sink under the seat with shame. But no doubt he was only thinking: 'Very young to be travelling by herself at this hour of the morning. Pretty too!' If he knew the real truth of her—how he would stare! But why should this utter stranger, this old disciplinarian, by a casual glance, by the mere form of his face, make her feel more guilty and ashamed than she had yet felt? That puzzled her. He was, must be, a narrow, conventional old man; but he had this power to make her feel ashamed, because she felt that he had faith in his gods, and was true to them; because she knew he would die sooner than depart from his creed of conduct. She turned to the window, biting her lips—angry and despairing. She would never—never get used to her position; it was no good! And again she had the longing of her dream, to tuck her face away into that coat, smell the scent of the frieze, snuggle in, be protected, and forget. 'If I had been that poor lonely little woman,' she thought, 'and had lost everything, I *should* have gone into the water. I should have rushed and jumped. It's only luck that I'm alive. I won't look at that old man again: then I shan't feel so bad."

She had bought some chocolate at the station, and nibbled it, gazing steadily at the fields covered with daisies and the first of the buttercups and cowslips. The three soldiers were talking now in carefully lowered voices. The words: "women," "under control," "perfect plague," came to her, making her ears burn. In the hypersensitive mood caused by the strain of yesterday, her broken night, and the emotional meeting with the little woman, she felt as if they were including her among those "women." 'If we stop, I'll get out,' she thought. But when the train did stop it was they who got out. She felt the old General's keen veiled glance sum her up for the last time, and looked full at him just for a moment. He touched his cap, and said: "Will you have the window up or down?" and lingered to draw it half-way up. His punctiliousness made her feel worse than ever. When the train had started again she roamed up and down her empty carriage; there was no more a way out of her position than out of this rolling cushioned carriage! And then she seemed to hear Fort's voice saying: 'Sit down please!' and to feel his fingers clasp her wrist. Oh! he, was nice and comforting; *he* would never reproach or remind her! And now, probably, she would never see him again.

The train drew up at last. She did not know where George

lodged, and would have to go to his hospital. She planned to get there at half past nine, and having eaten a sort of breakfast at the station, went forth into the town. The seaside was still wrapped in the early glamour which haunts chalk of a bright morning. But the streets were very much alive. Here was real business of the war. She passed houses which had been wrecked. Trucks clanged and shunted, great lorries rumbled smoothly by. Sea- and Air-planes were moving like great birds far up in the bright haze, and khaki was everywhere. But it was the sea Noel wanted. She made her way westward to a little beach; and, sitting down on a stone, opened her arms to catch the sun on her face and chest. The tide was nearly up, with the wavelets of a blue bright sea. The great fact, the greatest fact in the world, except the sun; vast and free, making everything human seem small and transitory! It did her good, like a tranquillising friend. The sea might be cruel and terrible, awful things it could do, and awful things were being done on it; but its wide level line, its never-ending song, its sane savour, were the best medicine she could possibly have taken. She rubbed the shelly sand between her fingers in absurd ecstasy; took off her shoes and stockings, paddled, and sat drying her legs in the sun.

When she left the little beach, she felt as if someone had said to her:

'Your troubles are very little. There's the sun, the sea, the air; enjoy them. They can't take those from you.'

At the hospital she had to wait half an hour in a little bare room before George came.

"Nollie! Splendid. I've got an hour. Let's get out of this cemetery. We'll have time for a good stretch on the tops. Jolly of you to have come to me. Tell us all about it."

When she had finished, he squeezed her arm. "I knew it wouldn't do. Your Dad forgot that he's a public figure, and must expect to be damned accordingly. But though you've cut and run, he'll resign all the same, Nollie."

"Oh, no!" cried Noel.

George shook his head.

"Yes, he'll resign, you'll see, he's got no worldly sense; not a grain."

"Then I shall have spoiled his life, just as if—oh, no!"

"Let's sit down here. I must be back at eleven."

They sat down on a bench, where the green cliff stretched out

before them, over a sea quite clear of haze, far down and very blue.

"Why should he resign," cried Noel again, "now that I've gone? He'll be lost without it all."

George smiled.

"Found, my dear. He'll be where he ought to be, Nollie, where the Church is, and the Churchmen are not—in the air!"

"Don't!" cried Noel passionately.

"No, no, I'm not chaffing. There's no room on earth for saints in authority. There's use for a saintly symbol, even if one doesn't hold with it, but there's no mortal use for those who try to have things both ways—to be saints and seers of visions, and yet to come the practical and worldly and rule ordinary men's lives. Saintly example—yes; but not saintly governance. You've been his deliverance, Nollie."

"But Daddy loves his Church."

George frowned. "Of course, it'll be a wrench. A man's bound to have a cosey feeling about a place where he's been boss so long; and there *is* something about a Church—the drone, the scent, the half darkness; there's beauty in it, it's a pleasant drug. But he's not being asked to give up the drug habit; only to stop administering drugs to others. Don't worry, Nollie; I don't believe that's ever suited him, it wants a thicker skin than he's got."

"But all the people he helps?"

"No reason he shouldn't go on helping people, is there?"

"But to go on living there, without—— Mother died there, you know!"

George grunted. "Dreams, Nollie, all round him; of the past and the future, of what people are and what he can do with them. I never see him without a skirmish, as you know, and yet I'm fond of him. But I should be twice as fond, and half as likely to skirmish, if he'd drop the habits of authority. Then I believe he'd have some real influence over me; there's something beautiful about him, I know that quite well."

"Yes," murmured Noel fervently.

"He's such a queer mixture," mused George. "Clean out of his age; chalks above most of the parsons in a spiritual sense and chalks below most of them in the worldly. And yet I believe he's in the right of it. The Church ought to be a forlorn hope, Nollie; then we should believe in it. Instead of that, it's a sort of business that no one can take too seriously. You see,

the Church *spiritual* can't make good in this age—has no chance of making good, and so in the main it's given it up for vested interests and social influence. Your father is a symbol of what the Church is not. But what about you, my dear? There's a room at my boarding-house, and only one old lady besides myself, who knits all the time. If Grace can get shifted we'll find a house, and you can have the baby. They'll send your luggage on from Paddington if you write; and in the meantime Gracie's got some things here that you can have."

"I'll have to send a wire to Daddy."

"I'll do that. You come to my diggings at half past one, and I'll settle you in. Until then, you'd better stay up here."

When he had gone she roamed a little farther, and lay down on the short grass, where the chalk broke through in patches. She could hear a distant rumbling, very low, travelling in that grass, the long mutter of the Flanders guns. 'I wonder if it's as beautiful a day there,' she thought. 'How dreadful to see no green, no butterflies, no flowers—not even sky—for the dust of the shells. Oh! won't it ever, ever end?' And a sort of passion for the earth welled up in her, the warm grassy earth along which she lay, pressed so close that she could feel it with every inch of her body, and the soft spikes of the grass against her nose and lips. An aching sweetness tortured her, she wanted the earth to close its arms about her, she wanted the answer to her embrace of it. She was alive, and wanted love. Not death —not loneliness—not death! And out there, where the guns muttered, millions of men would be thinking that same thought!

X

Pierson had passed nearly the whole night with the relics of his past, the records of his stewardship, the tokens of his short married life. The idea which had possessed him walking home in the moonlight sustained him in that melancholy task of docketing and destruction. There was not nearly so much to do as one would have supposed, for, with all his dreaminess, he had been oddly neat and business-like in all parish matters. But a hundred times that night he stopped, overcome by memories. Every corner, drawer, photograph, paper was a thread in the long-spun web of his life in this house. Some phase of his work, some vision of his wife or daughters started forth from each bit of furniture, picture, doorway. Noiseless, in his slippers, he stole up and down between the study, dining-room, drawing-room, and anyone seeing him at his work in the dim light which visited the staircase from above the front door and the upper-passage window, would have thought: 'A ghost, a ghost gone into mourning for the condition of the world.' He had to make this reckoning to-night, while the exaltation of his new idea was on him; had to rummage out the very depths of old association, so that once for all he might know whether he had strength to close the door on the past. Five o'clock struck before he had finished, and, almost dropping from fatigue, sat down at his little piano in bright daylight. The last memory to beset him was the first of all; his honeymoon, before they came back to live in this house, already chosen, furnished, and waiting for them. They had spent it in Germany—the first days in Baden-baden, and each morning had been awakened by a Chorale played down in the gardens of the Kurhaus, a gentle, beautiful tune, to remind them that they were in heaven. And softly, so softly that the tunes seemed to be but dreams he began playing those old Chorales, one after another, so that the stilly sounds floated out, through the opened window, puzzling the early birds and cats and those few humans who were abroad as yet. . . .

He received the telegram from Noel in the afternoon of the same day, just as he was about to set out for Leila's to get news of her; and close on the top of it came Lavendie. He found the painter standing disconsolate in front of his picture.

"*Mademoiselle* has deserted me?"

"I'm afraid we shall all desert you soon, *monsieur.*"

"You are going?"

"Yes, I am leaving here. I hope to go to France."

"And *mademoiselle?*"

"She is at the sea with my son-in-law."

The painter ran his hands through his hair, but stopped them half-way, as if aware that he was being guilty of ill-breeding.

"*Mon dieu!*" he said. "Is this not a calamity for you, *monsieur le curé?*" But his sense of the calamity was so patiently limited to his unfinished picture that Pierson could not help a smile.

"Ah, *monsieur!*" said the painter, on whom nothing was lost. "*Comme je suis egoiste!* I show my feelings; it is deplorable. My disappointment must seem a bagatelle to you, who will be so distressed at leaving your old home. This must be a time of great trouble. Believe me, I understand. But to sympathise with a grief which is not shown would be an impertinence, would it not? You English gentlefolk do not let us share your griefs; you keep them to yourselves."

Pierson stared. "True," he said. "Quite true!"

"I am no judge of Christianity, *monsieur,* but for us artists the doors of the human heart stand open, our own and others. I suppose we have no pride—*c'est très-indelicat.* Tell me, *monsieur,* you would not think it worthy of you to speak to me of your troubles, would you, as I have spoken of mine?"

Pierson bowed his head, abashed.

"You preach of universal charity and love," went on Lavendie; "but how can there be that when you teach also secretly the keeping of your troubles to yourselves? Man responds to example, not to teaching; you set the example of the stranger, not the brother. You expect from others what you do not give. Frankly, *monsieur,* do you not feel that with every revelation of your soul and feelings, virtue goes out of you? And I will tell you why, if you will not think it an offence. In opening your hearts you feel that you lose authority. You are officers, and must never forget that. Is it not so?"

Pierson grew red. "I hope there is another feeling too. I think we feel that to speak of our sufferings or deeper feelings is to obtrude oneself, to make a fuss, to be self-concerned, when we might be concerned with others."

"*Monsieur, au fond* we are all concerned with self. To seem

selfless is but your particular way of cultivating the perfection of self. You admit that not to obtrude self is the way to perfect yourself. *Eh bien!* What is that but a deeper concern with self? To be free of this, there is no way but to forget all about oneself in what one is doing, as I forget everything when I am painting. But," he added with a sudden smile, "you would not wish to forget the perfecting of self—it would not be right in your profession. So I must take away this picture, must I not? It is one of my best works. I regret much not to have finished it."

"Some day, perhaps——"

"Some day! The picture will stand still, but *mademoiselle* will not. She will rush at something, and behold! this face will be gone. No; I prefer to keep it as it is. It has truth now." And lifting down the canvas, he stood it against the wall and folded up the easel. "*Bon soir, monsieur,* you have been very good to me." He wrung Pierson's hand; and his face for a moment seemed all eyes and spirit. "*Adieu!*"

"Good-bye," Pierson murmured. "God bless you!"

"I don't know if I have great confidence in Him," replied Lavendie, "but I shall ever remember that so good a man as you has wished it. To *mademoiselle* my distinguished salutations, if you please. If you will permit me, I will come back for my other things to-morrow." And carrying easel and canvas, he departed.

Pierson stayed in the old drawing-room, waiting for Gratian to come in, and thinking over the painter's words. Had his education and position really made it impossible for him to be brotherly? Was this the secret of the impotence which he sometimes felt; the reason why charity and love were not more alive in the hearts of his congregation? 'God knows I've no consciousness of having felt myself superior,' he thought; 'and yet I would be truly ashamed to tell people of my troubles and of my struggles. Can it be that Christ, if he were on earth, would count us Pharisees, believing ourselves not as other men? But surely it is not as Christians but rather as gentlemen that we keep ourselves to ourselves. Officers, he called us. I fear —I fear it is true.' Ah, well! There would not be many more days now. He would learn out there how to open the hearts of others, and his own. Suffering and death levelled all barriers, made all men brothers. He was still sitting there when Gratian came in; and taking her hand, he said:

"Noel has gone down to George, and I want you to get transferred and go to them, Gracie. I'm giving up the parish and asking for a chaplaincy."

"Giving up? After all this time? Is it because of Nollie?"

"No, I think not; I think the time has come. I feel my work here is barren."

"Oh, no! And even if it is, it's only because——"

Pierson smiled. "Because of what, Gracie?"

"Dad, it's what I've felt in myself. We want to think and decide things for ourselves, we want to own our consciences, we can't take things at second-hand any longer."

Pierson's face darkened. "Ah!" he said, "to have lost faith is a grievous thing."

"We're gaining charity," cried Gratian.

"The two things are not opposed, my dear."

"Not in theory; but in practice I think they often are. Oh, Dad! you look so tired. Have you really made up your mind? Won't you feel lost?"

"For a little. I shall find myself, out there."

But the look on his face was too much for Gratian's composure, and she turned away.

Pierson went down to his study to write his letter of resignation. Sitting before that blank sheet of paper, he realised to the full how strongly he had resented the public condemnation passed on his own flesh and blood, how much his action was the expression of a purely mundane championship of his daughter; of a mundane mortification. 'Pride,' he thought. 'Ought I to stay and conquer it?' Twice he set his pen down, twice took it up again. He could not conquer it. To stay where he was not wanted, on a sort of sufferance—never! And while he sat before that empty sheet of paper he tried to do the hardest thing a man can do—to see himself as others see him; and met with such success as one might expect—harking at once to the verdicts, not of others at all, but of his own conscience; and coming soon to that perpetual gnawing sense which had possessed him ever since the war began, that it was his duty to be dead. This feeling that to be alive was unworthy of him when so many of his flock had made the last sacrifice, was reinforced by his domestic tragedy and the bitter disillusionment it had brought. A sense of having lost caste weighed on him, while he sat there with his past receding from him, dusty and unreal. He had the queerest feeling of his old life falling from

him, dropping round his feet like the outworn scales of a serpent, rung after rung of tasks and duties performed day after day, year after year. Had they ever been quite real? Well, he had shed them now, and was to move out into life illumined by the great reality—death! And taking up his pen, he wrote his resignation.

XI

1 §

The last Sunday, sunny and bright! Though he did not ask her to go, Gratian went to every Service that day. And the sight of her, after this long interval, in their old pew, where once he had been wont to see his wife's face, and draw refreshment therefrom, affected Pierson more than anything else. He had told no one of his coming departure, shrinking from the falsity and suppression which must underlie every allusion and expression of regret. In the last minute of his last sermon he would tell them! He went through the day in a sort of dream. Truly proud and sensitive, under this social blight, he shrank from all alike, made no attempt to single out supporters or adherents from those who had fallen away. He knew there would be some, perhaps many, seriously grieved that he was going; but to try and realise who they were, to weigh them in the scales against the rest and so forth, was quite against his nature. It was all or nothing. But when for the last time of all those hundreds, he mounted the steps of his dark pulpit, he showed no trace of finality, did not perhaps even feel it yet. For so beautiful a summer evening the congregation was large. In spite of all reticence, rumour was busy and curiosity still rife. The writers of the letters, anonymous and otherwise, had spent a week, not indeed in proclaiming what they had done, but in justifying to themselves the secret fact that they had done it. And this was best achieved by speaking to their neighbours of the serious and awkward situation of the poor Vicar. The result was visible in a better attendance than had been seen since summer-time began.

Pierson had never been a great preacher, his voice lacked resonance and pliancy, his thought breadth and buoyancy, and he was not free from the sing-song which mars the utterance of many who have to speak professionally. But he always made an impression of goodness and sincerity. On this last Sunday evening he preached again the first sermon he had ever preached from that pulpit, fresh from the honeymoon with his young wife. "Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these."

It lacked now the happy fervour of that most happy of all his days, yet gained poignancy, coming from so worn a face and voice. Gratian, who knew that he was going to end with his farewell, was in a choke of emotion long before he came to it. She sat winking away her tears, and not till he paused, for so long that she thought his strength had failed, did she look up. He was leaning a little forward, seeming to see nothing; but his hands, grasping the pulpit's edge, were quivering. There was deep silence in the Church, for the look of his face and figure was strange, even to Gratian. When his lips parted again to speak, a mist covered her eyes, and she lost sight of him.

"Friends, I am leaving you; these are the last words I shall ever speak in this place. I go to other work. You have been very good to me. God has been very good to me. I pray with my whole heart that He may bless you all. Amen! Amen!"

The mist cleared into tears, and she could see him again gazing down at her. Was it at her? He was surely seeing something —some vision sweeter than reality, something he loved more dearly. She fell on her knees, and buried her face in her hand. All through the hymn she knelt, and through his clear slow Benediction: "The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord; and the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, be amongst you and remain with you always." And still she knelt on, till she was alone in the Church. Then she rose and stole home. He did not come in; she did not expect him. 'It's over,' she kept thinking; 'all over. My beloved Daddy! Now he has no home; Nollie and I have pulled him down. And yet I couldn't help it, and perhaps she couldn't. Poor Nollie! . . .'

2 §

Pierson had stayed in the vestry, talking with his choir and wardens; there was no hitch, for his resignation had been accepted, and he had arranged with a friend to carry on till the new Vicar was appointed. When they were gone he went back into the empty Church, and mounted to the organ-loft. A little window up there was open, and he stood leaning against the stone, looking out, resting his whole being. Only now that it was over did he know what stress he had been through. Sparrows were chirping, but sound of traffic had almost ceased, in

that quiet Sunday hour of the evening meal. Finished! Incredible that he would never come up here again, never see those roof-lines, that corner of Square Garden, and hear this familiar chirping of the sparrows. He sat down at the organ and began to play. The last time the sound would roll out and echo round the emptied House of God. For a long time he played, while the building darkened slowly down there below him. Of all that he would leave, he would miss this most—the right to come and play here in the darkening Church, to release emotional sound in this dim empty space growing ever more beautiful. From chord to chord he let himself go deeper and deeper into the surge and swell of those sound waves, losing all sense of actuality, till the music and the whole dark building were fused in one rapturous solemnity. Away down there the darkness crept over the Church, till the pews, the altar—all was invisible, save the columns, and the walls. He began playing his favourite slow movement from Beethoven's Seventh Symphony—kept to the end, for the visions it ever brought him. And a cat, which had been stalking the sparrows, crept in through the little window, and crouched, startled, staring at him with her green eyes. He closed the organ, went quickly down, and locked up his Church for the last time. It was warmer outside than in, and lighter, for daylight was not quite gone. He moved away a few yards, and stood looking up. Walls, buttresses, and spire were clothed in milky shadowy grey. The top of the spire seemed to touch a star. 'Good-bye, my Church!' he thought. 'Good-bye, good-bye!' He felt his face quiver; clenched his teeth, and turned away.

XII

1 §

When Noel fled, Fort had started forward to stop her; then, realising that with his lameness he could never catch her, he went back and entered Leila's bedroom.

She had taken off her dress, and was standing in front of her glass, with the cigarette still in her mouth; and the only movement was the curling of its blue smoke. He could see her face reflected, pale, with a little spot of red in each cheek, and burning red ears. She had not seemed to hear him coming in, but he saw her eyes change when they caught his reflection in the mirror. From lost and blank, they became alive and smouldering.

"Noel's gone!" he said.

She answered, as if to his reflection in the glass:

"And you haven't gone too? Ah, no! Of course—your leg! She fled, I suppose? It was rather a jar, my coming in, I'm afraid."

"No; it was *my* coming in that was the jar."

Leila turned round. "Jimmy! I wonder you could discuss me. The rest——" She shrugged her shoulders— "But that——!"

"I was not discussing you. I merely said you were not to be envied for having me. Are you?"

The moment he had spoken, he was sorry. The anger in her eyes changed instantly, first to searching, then to misery. She cried out:

"I *was* to be envied. Oh! Jimmy; I *was!*" and flung herself face down on the bed.

Through Fort's mind went the thought: 'Atrocious!' How could he soothe—make her feel—that he loved her, when he didn't—that he wanted her, when he wanted Noel. He went up to the bedside and touched her timidly:

"Leila, what is it? You're overtired. What's the matter? I couldn't help the child's being here. Why do you let it upset you? She's gone. It's all right. Things are just as they were."

"Yes!" came the strangled echo; "just!"

He knelt down and stroked her arm. It shivered under the touch, seemed to stop shivering and wait for the next touch, as if hoping it might be warmer; shivered again.

"Look at me!" he said. "What is it you want? I'm ready to do anything."

She turned and drew herself up on the bed, screwing herself back against the pillow as if for support, with her knees drawn under her. He was astonished at the strength of her face and figure, thus entrenched.

"My dear Jimmy!" she said, "I want you to do nothing but get me another cigarette. At my age one expects no more than one gets." She held out her thumb and finger: "Do you mind?"

Fort turned away to get the cigarette. With what bitter restraint and curious little smile she had said that! But no sooner was he out of the room and hunting blindly for the cigarettes, than his mind was filled with an aching concern for Noel, fleeing like that, reckless and hurt, with nowhere to go. He found the polished birchwood box which held the cigarettes, and made a desperate effort to dismiss the image of the girl before he again reached Leila. She was still sitting there, with her arms crossed, in the stillness of one whose every nerve and fibre was stretched taut.

"Have one yourself," she said. "The pipe of peace."

Fort lit the cigarettes, and sat down on the edge of the bed; and his mind at once went back to Noel.

"Yes," she said suddenly; "I wonder where she's gone. Can you see her? She might do something reckless a second time. Poor Jimmy! It would be a pity. And so that monk's been here, and drunk champagne. Good idea! Get me some, Jimmy!"

Again Fort went, and with him the image of the girl. When he came back the second time, she had put on that dark silk garment in which she had appeared suddenly radiant the fatal night after the Queen's Hall concert. She took the wineglass, and passed him, going into the sitting-room.

"Come and sit down," she said. "Is your leg hurting you?"

"Not more than usual," and he sat down beside her.

"Won't you have some? 'In vino veritas,' my friend."

He shook his head, and said humbly: "I admire you, Leila."

"That's lucky. I don't know anyone else who would." And she drank her champagne at a draught.

"Don't you wish," she said suddenly, "that I had been one of those wonderful New Women, all brain and good works. How I should have talked the Universe up and down, and the war, and Causes, drinking tea, and never boring you to try and love me. What a pity!"

But to Fort there had come Noel's words: "It's awfully funny, isn't it?"

"Leila," he said suddenly, "something's got to be done. So long as you don't wish me to, I'll promise never to see that child again."

"My dear boy, she's not a child. She's ripe for love; and—I'm too ripe for love. That's what's the matter, and I've got to lump it." She wrenched her hand out of his and, dropping the empty glass, covered her face. The awful sensation which visits the true Englishman when a scene stares him in the face spun in Fort's brain. Should he seize her hands, drag them down, and kiss her? Should he get up and leave her alone? Speak, or keep silent; try to console; try to pretend? And he did absolutely nothing. So far as a man *can* understand that moment in a woman's life when she accepts the defeat of Youth and Beauty, he understood perhaps; but it was only a glimmering. He understood much better how she was recognising once for all that she loved where she was not loved.

'And I can't help that,' he thought dumbly; 'simply can't help that!' Nothing he could say or do would alter it. No words can convince a woman when kisses have lost reality. Then, to his infinite relief, she took her hands from her face, and said:

"This is very dull. I think you'd better go, Jimmy."

He made an effort to speak, but was too afraid of falsity in his voice.

"Very nearly a scene!" said Leila. "My God! How men hate them! So do I. I've had too many in my time; nothing comes of them but a headache next morning. I've spared you that, Jimmy. Give me a kiss for it."

He bent down and put his lips to hers. With all his heart he tried to answer the passion in her kiss. She pushed him away suddenly, and said faintly:

"Thank you; you did try!"

Fort dashed his hand across his eyes. The sight of her face

just then moved him horribly. What a brute he felt! He took her limp hand, put it to his lips, and murmured:

"I shall come in to-morrow. We'll go to the theatre, shall we? Good night, Leila!"

But, in opening the door, he caught sight of her face, staring at him, evidently waiting for him to turn; the eyes had a frightened look. They went suddenly soft, so soft as to give his heart a squeeze.

She lifted her hand, blew him a kiss, and he saw her smiling. Without knowing what his own lips answered, he went out. He could not make up his mind to go away, but, crossing to the railings, stood leaning against them, looking up at her windows. She had been very good to him. He felt like a man who has won at cards, and sneaked away without giving the loser his revenge. If only she hadn't loved him; and it had been a soulless companionship, a quite sordid business. Anything rather than this! English to the backbone, he could not divest himself of a sense of guilt. To see no way of making up to her, of straightening it out, made him feel intensely mean. 'Shall I go up again?' he thought. The window-curtain moved. Then the shreds of light up there vanished. 'She's gone to bed,' he thought. 'I should only upset her worse. Where is Noel, now, I wonder? I shall never see *her* again, I suppose. Altogether a bad business. My God, yes! A bad—bad business!'

And, painfully, for his leg was hurting him, he walked away.

2 §

Leila was only too well aware of a truth that feelings are no less real, poignant, and important to those outside morality's ring fence than to those within. Her feelings were, indeed, probably even more real and poignant, just as a wild fruit's flavour is sharper than that of the tame product. Opinion—she knew—would say, that having wilfully chosen a position outside morality she had not half the case for broken-heartedness she would have had if Fort had been her husband. Opinion—she knew—would say she had no claim on him, and the sooner an illegal tie was broken, the better! But she felt fully as wretched as if she had been married. She had not wanted to be outside morality; never in her life wanted to be that. She was like those who by confession shed their sins and start again with a clear conscience. She never meant to sin, only to love,

and when she was in love, nothing else mattered for the moment. But, though a gambler, she had always so far paid up. Only, this time the stakes were the heaviest a woman can put down. It was her last throw; and she knew it. So long as a woman believed in her attraction, there was hope, even when the curtain fell on a love-affair! But for Leila the lamp of belief had suddenly gone out, and when this next curtain dropped she felt that she must sit in the dark until old age made her indifferent. And between forty-four and real old age a gulf is fixed. This was the first time a man had tired of her. Why! he had been tired before he began, or so she felt. In one swift moment as of a drowning person, she saw again all the passages of their companionship, knew with certainty that it had never been a genuine flame. Shame ran, consuming, in her veins. She buried her face in the cushions. This girl had possessed his real heart all the time. With a laugh she thought: 'I put my money on the wrong horse; I ought to have backed Edward. I could have turned that poor monk's head. If only I had never seen Jimmy again; if I had torn his letter up, I could have made poor Edward love me!' Ifs! What folly! Things happened as they must! And, starting up, she began to roam the little room. Without Jimmy she would be wretched, with him she would be wretched too! 'I can't bear to see his face,' she thought; 'and I can't live here without him! It's really funny!' The thought of her hospital filled her with loathing. To go there day after day with this despair eating at her heart—she simply could not. She went over her resources. She had more money than she thought; Jimmy had given her a Christmas present of five hundred pounds. She had wanted to tear up the cheque, or force him to take it back; but the realities of the previous five years had prevailed with her, and she had banked it. She was glad now. She had not to consider money. Her mind sought to escape in the past. She thought of her first husband, Ronny Fane; of their mosquito-curtained rooms in that ghastly Madras heat. Poor Ronny! What a pale, cynical young ghost started up under that name. She thought of Lynch, his horsey, matter-of-fact solidity. She had loved them both—for a time. She thought of the veldt, of Constantia, and the loom of Table Mountain under the stars; and—the first sight of Jimmy, his straight look, the curve of his crisp head, the kind, fighting-schoolboy frankness of his face. Even now, after all those months of their

companionship, that long-ago evening at grape harvest, when she sang to him under the scented creepers, was the memory of him most charged with real feeling. That one evening at any rate he had longed for her, eleven years ago, when she was in her prime. She could have held her own then; Noel would have come in vain. To think that this girl had still fifteen years before she would be even in her prime. Fifteen years of witchery; and then another ten before she was on the shelf. Why! if Noel married Jimmy, he would be an old man doting on her still, by the time she had reached this fatal age of forty-four. She felt as if she must scream, and, stuffing her handkerchief into her mouth, turned out the light. Darkness cooled her, a little. She pulled aside the curtains, and let in the moonlight. Jimmy and that girl were out in it somewhere, seeking each other, if not in body, then in thought. And soon, somehow, somewhere, they would come together—come together because Fate meant them to! Fate which had given her young cousin a likeness to herself; placed her, too, in just such a hopeless position as appealed to Jimmy, and gave him a chance against younger men. She saw it with bitter surety. Good gamblers cut their losses! Yes, and proud women did not keep unwilling lovers! If she had even an outside chance, she would trail her pride, drag it through the mud, through thorns! But she had not. And she clenched her fist, and struck out at the night, as though at the face of that Fate which one could never reach—impalpable, remorseless, surrounding Fate with its faint mocking smile, devoid of all human warmth. Nothing could set back the clock, and give her what this girl had. Time had "done her in," as it "did in" every woman, one by one. And she saw herself going down the years, powdering a little more, painting a little more, touching up her hair, till it was all artifice, holding on by every little device—and all, to what end? To see his face get colder and colder, hear his voice more and more constrained to gentleness; and know that underneath, aversion was growing with the thought: 'You are keeping me from life, and love!' till one evening, in sheer nerve-break, she would say or do some fearful thing, and he would come no more. 'No, Jimmy!' she thought; 'find her, and stay with her. You're not worth all that!' And pulling-to the curtains, as though with that gesture she could shut out her creeping fate, she turned up the light and sat down at her writing-table. She stayed some minutes motionless, her chin resting on her hands,

the dark silk fallen down from her arms. A little mirror, framed in curiously carved ivory, picked up by her in an Indian bazaar twenty-five years ago, hung on a level with her face and gave that face back to her. 'I'm not ugly,' she thought passionately, 'I'm not. I still have some looks left. If only that girl hadn't come. And it was all my doing. Oh, what made me write to both of them, Edward and Jimmy?' She turned the mirror aside, and took up a pen.

"My dear Jimmy," she wrote:

"It will be better for us both if you take a holiday from here. Don't come again till I write for you. I'm sorry I made you so much disturbance to-night. Have a good time, and a good rest; and don't worry.

"Your——"

So far she had written when a tear dropped on the page, and she had to tear it up and begin again. This time she wrote to the end—"Your Leila." 'I must post it now,' she thought, 'or he may not get it before to-morrow evening. I couldn't go through with this again.' She hurried out with it and slipped it in a pillar box. The night smelled of flowers; and, hastening back, she lay down, and stayed awake for hours, tossing, and staring at the dark.

XIII

1 §

Leila had pluck, but little patience. Her one thought was to get away and she at once began settling up her affairs and getting a permit to return to South Africa. The excitements of purchase and preparation were as good an anodyne as she could have taken. The perils of the sea were at full just then, and the prospect of danger gave her a sort of pleasure. 'If I go down,' she thought, 'all the better; brisk, instead of long and dreary.' But when she had the permit and her cabin was booked, the irrevocability of her step came to her with full force. Should she see him again or no? Her boat started in three days, and she must decided. If in compunction he were to be affectionate, she knew she would never keep to her decision, and then the horror would begin again, till again she was forced to this same action. She let the hours go and go till the very day before, when the ache to see him and the dread of it had become so unbearable that she could not keep quiet. Late that afternoon—everything, to the last label, ready—she went out, still undecided. An itch to turn the dagger in her wounds, to know what had become of Noel, took her to Edward's house. Almost unconsciously she had put on her prettiest frock, and spent an hour before the glass. A feverishness of soul, more than of body, which had hung about her ever since that night, gave her colour. She looked her prettiest; and she bought a gardenia at a shop in Baker Street and fastened it in her dress. Reaching the old Square, she was astonished to see a board up with the words: "To let," though the house still looked inhabited. She rang, and was shown into the drawing-room. She had only twice been in this house before; and for some reason, perhaps because of her own unhappiness, the old, rather shabby room struck her as pathetic, as if inhabited by the past. 'I wonder what his wife was like,' she thought. And then she saw, hanging against a strip of black velvet on the wall, that faded colour sketch of the slender young woman leaning forward, with her hands crossed in her lap. The colouring was lavender and old ivory, with faint touches of rose. The eyes, so living, were a little like Gratian's; the whole face deli-

cate, eager, good. 'Yes,' she thought, 'he must have loved you very much. To say good-bye must have been hard.' She was still standing before it when Pierson came in.

"That's a dear face, Edward. I've come to say good-bye. I'm leaving for South Africa to-morrow." And, as her hand touched his, she thought: 'I must have been mad to think I could ever have made him love me.'

"Are you—are you leaving him?"

Leila nodded.

"That's very brave, and wonderful."

"Oh! no. Needs must when the devil drives—that's all. I don't give up happiness of my own accord. That's not within a hundred miles of the truth. What I shall become, I don't know, but nothing better, you may be sure. I give up because I can't keep, and you know why. Where is Noel?"

"Down at the sea, with George and Gratian."

He was looking at her in wonder; and the pained, puzzled expression on his face angered her.

"I see the house is to let. Who'd have thought a child like that could root up two fossils like us? Never mind, Edward, there's the same blood in us. We'll keep our ends up in our own ways. Where are *you* going?"

"They'll give me a chaplaincy in the East, I think."

For a wild moment Leila thought: 'Shall I offer to go with him—the two lost dogs together?'

"What would have happened, Edward, if you had proposed to me that May week, when we were—a little bit in love? Which would it have been worst for, you or me?"

"You wouldn't have taken me, Leila."

"Oh, one never knows. But you'd never have been a priest then, and you'd never have become a saint."

"Don't use that silly word. If you knew——"

"I do; I can see that you've been half burned alive; half burned and half buried! Well, you have your reward, whatever it is, and I mine. Good-bye, Edward!" She took his hand. "You might give me your blessing; I want it."

Pierson put his other hand on her shoulder and, bending forward, kissed her forehead.

The tears rushed up in Leila's eyes. "Ah me!" she said, "it's a sad world!" And wiping the quivering off her lips with the back of her gloved hand, she went quickly past him to the door. She looked back from there. He had not stirred, but

his lips were moving. 'He's praying for me!' she thought. 'How funny!'

2 §

The moment she was outside, she forgot him; the dreadful ache for Fort seemed to have been whipped up within her, as if that figure of lifelong repression had infuriated the love of life and pleasure in her. She must and would see Jimmy again, if she had to wait and seek for him all night! It was nearly seven, he would surely have finished at the War Office; he might be at his Club or at his rooms. She made for the latter.

The little street near Buckingham Gate, where no wag had chalked "Peace" on the doors for nearly a year now, had an arid look after a hot day's sun. The hair-dresser's shop below his rooms was still open, and the private door ajar. 'I won't ring,' she thought; 'I'll go straight up.' While she was mounting the two flights of stairs, she stopped twice, breathless, from a pain in her side. She often had that pain now, as if the longing in her heart strained it physically. On the modest landing at the top, outside his rooms, she waited, leaning against the wall, which was covered with a red paper. A window at the back was open and the confused sound of singing came in—a chorus: "*Vivé-la, vivé-la, vivé-la vé. Vivé la compagnie.*" So it came to her. 'O God!' she thought: 'Let him be in, let him be nice to me. It's the last time.' And, sick from anxiety, she opened the door. He *was* in—lying on a wicker-couch against the wall in the far corner, with his arms crossed behind his head, and a pipe in his mouth; his eyes were closed, and he neither moved, nor opened them, perhaps supposing her to be the servant. Noiseless as a cat, Leila crossed the room till she stood above him. And waiting for him to come out of that defiant lethargy, she took her fill of this thin, bony face, healthy and hollow at the same time. With teeth clenched on the pipe it had a look of hard resistance, as of a man with his head back, his arms pinioned to his sides, stiffened against some creature, clining and climbing and trying to drag him down. The pipe was alive, and dribbled smoke; and his leg, the injured one, wriggled restlessly, as if worrying him; but the rest of him was as utterly and obstinately still as though he were asleep. His hair grew thick and crisp, not a thread of grey in it, the teeth which held the pipe glinted white and strong. His face was young; so much younger than hers. Why did she love it—

the face of a man who couldn't love her? For a second she felt as if she could seize the cushion which had slipped down off the couch, and smother him as he lay there, refusing, so it seemed to her, to come to consciousness. Love despised! Humiliation! She nearly turned and stole away. Then through the door, left open, behind her, the sound of that chorus: "*Vivé-la, vivé-la, vivé-la vé!*" came in and jolted her nerves unbearably. Tearing the gardenia from her breast, she flung it on his upturned face.

"Jimmy!"

Fort struggled up, and stared at her. His face was comic from bewilderment, and she broke into a little nervous laugh.

"You weren't dreaming of me, dear Jimmy, that's certain. In what garden were you wandering?"

"Leila! You! How—how jolly!"

"How—how jolly! I wanted to see you, so I came. And I have seen you, as you are, when you aren't with me. I shall remember it; it was good for me—awfully good for me."

"I didn't hear you."

"Far, far away, my dear. Put my gardenia in your buttonhole. Stop, I'll pin it in. Have you had a good rest all this week? Do you like my dress? It's new. You wouldn't have noticed it, would you?"

"I should have noticed. I think it's charming."

"Jimmy, I believe that nothing—nothing will ever shake your chivalry."

"Chivalry? I have none."

"I am going to shut the door, do you mind?" But he went to the door himself, shut it, and came back to her. Leila looked up at him.

"Jimmy, if ever you loved me a little bit, be nice to me to-day. And if I say things—if I'm bitter—don't mind; don't notice it. Promise!"

"I promise."

She took off her hat and sat leaning against him on the couch, so that she could not see his face. And with his arm round her, she let herself go, deep into the waters of illusion; down—down, trying to forget there was a surface to which she must return; like a little girl she played that game of make-believe. 'He loves me—he loves me—he loves me!' To lose herself like that for just an hour, only an hour; she felt that she would give the rest of the time vouchsafed to her; give it all and willingly. Her

hand clasped his against her heart, she turned her face backward, up to his, closing her eyes so as still not to see his face; the scent of the gardenia in his coat hurt her, so sweet and strong it was.

3 §

When with her hat on she stood ready to go, it was getting dark. She had come out of her dream now, was playing at make-believe no more. And she stood with a stony smile, in the half-dark, looking between her lashes at the mortified expression on his unconscious face.

"Poor Jimmy!" she said; "I'm not going to keep you from dinner any longer. No, don't come with me. I'm going alone; and don't light up, for heaven's sake."

She put her hand on the lapel of his coat. "That flower's gone brown at the edges. Throw it away; I can't bear faded flowers. Nor can you. Get yourself a fresh one to-morrow."

She pulled the flower from his buttonhole and, crushing it in her hand, held her face up.

"Well, kiss me once more; it won't hurt you."

For one moment her lips clung to his with all their might. She wrenched them away, felt for the handle blindly, opened the door, and, shutting it in his face, went slowly, swaying a little, down the stairs. She trailed a gloved hand along the wall, as if its solidity could help her. At the last half-landing, where a curtain hung, dividing off back premises, she stopped and listened. There wasn't a sound. 'If I stand here behind this curtain,' she thought, 'I shall see him again.' She slipped behind the curtain, close drawn but for a little chink. It was so dark there that she could not see her own hand. She heard the door open, and his slow footsteps coming down the stairs. His feet, knees, whole figure came into sight, his face just a dim blur. He passed, smoking a cigarette. She crammed her hand against her mouth to stop herself from speaking and the crushed gardenia filled her nostrils with its cold, fragrant velvet. He was gone, the door below was shut. A wild, half-stupid longing came on her to go up again, wait till he came in, throw herself upon him, tell him she was going, beg him to keep her with him. Ah! and he would! He would look at her with that haggard pity she could not bear, and say, "Of course, Leila, of course." No! By God, no! "I am going quietly home," she muttered; "just quietly home! Come along, be brave; don't be a fool!

Come along!" And she went down into the street. At the entrance to the Park she saw him, fifty yards in front, dawdling along. And, as if she had been his shadow lengthened out to that far distance, she moved behind him. Slowly, always at that distance, she followed him under the plane-trees, along the Park railings, past St. James's Palace, into Pall Mall. He went up some steps, and vanished into his Club. It was the end. She looked up at the building; a monstrous granite tomb, all dark. An emptied cab was just moving from the door. She got in. "Camelot Mansions, St. John's Wood." And braced against the cushions, panting, and clenching her hands, she thought: 'Well, I've seen him again. Hard crust's better than no bread. Oh, God! All finished—not a crumb, not a crumb! *Vivé-la, vivé-la, vivé-la vé. Vivé-la compagnie!*'

XIV

Fort had been lying there about an hour, sleeping and awake, before that visit. He had dreamed a curious and wonderful emotionalising dream. A long grey line, in a dim light, neither of night nor morning, the whole length of the battle-front in France, charging in short drives, which carried the line a little forward, with just a tiny pause and suck-back; then on again irresistibly, on and on; and at each rush, every voice, his own among them, shouted: "Hooray! the English! Hooray! the English!" The sensation of that advancing tide of dim figures in grey light, the throb and roar, the wonderful, rhythmic steady drive of it, no more to be stopped than the waves of an incoming tide, was gloriously fascinating; life was nothing, death nothing. "Hooray, the English!" In that dream, he was his country, he was every one of that long charging line, driving forward in those great heaving pulsations, irresistible, on and on. Out of the very centre of this intoxicating dream he had been dragged by some street noise, and had closed his eyes again, in the vain hope that he might dream it on to its end. But it came no more; and lighting his pipe, he lay there wondering at its fervid, fantastic realism. Death was nothing, if his country lived and won. In waking hours he never had quite that single-hearted knowledge of himself. And what marvellously real touches got mixed into the fantastic stuff of dreams, as if something were at work to convince the dreamer in spite of himself —"Hooray!" not "Hurrah!" Just common "Hooray!" And "the English," not the literary "British." And then the soft flower had struck his forehead, and Leila's voice cried: "Jimmy!"

When she left him, his thought was just a tired: 'Well, so it's begun again!' What did it matter, since common loyalty and compassion cut him off from what his heart desired; and that desire was absurd, as little likely of attainment as the moon. What did it matter? If it gave her any pleasure to love him, let it go on! Yet, all the time that he was walking across under the plane-trees, Noel seemed to walk in front of him, just out of reach, so that he ached with the thought that he would never catch her up, and walk beside her.

Two days later, on reaching his rooms in the evening, he found this letter on ship's note-paper, with the Plymouth postmark:

"Fare thee well, and if for ever,
Then for ever fare thee well!

"LEILA."

He read it with a really horrible feeling, for all the world as if he had been accused of a crime and did not know whether he had committed it or not. And, trying to collect his thoughts, he took a cab and drove to her flat. It was closed, but her address was given him; a bank in Cape Town. He had received his release. In his remorse and relief, so confusing and so poignant, he heard the driver of the cab asking where he wanted to go now. "Oh, back again!" But before they had gone a mile he corrected the address, in an impulse of which next moment he felt thoroughly ashamed. What he was doing indeed, was as indecent as if he were driving from the funeral of his wife to the boudoir of another woman. When he reached the old Square, and the words "To let" stared him in the face, he felt a curious relief, though it meant that he would not see her whom to see for ten minutes he felt he would give a year of life. Dismissing his cab, he stood debating whether to ring the bell. The sight of a maid's face at the window decided him. Mr. Pierson was out, and the young ladies were away. He asked for Mrs. Laird's address, and turned away, almost into the arms of Pierson himself. The greeting was stiff and strange. 'Does he know that Leila's gone?' he thought. 'If so, he must think me the most awful skunk. And am I? Am I?'

When he reached home, he sat down to write to Leila. But having stared at the paper for an hour and written these three lines:

"MY DEAR LEILA,

"I cannot express to you the feelings with which I received your letter——"

he tore it up. Nothing would be adequate, nothing would be decent. Let the dead past bury its dead—the dead past which in his heart had never been alive! Why pretend? He had done his best to keep his end up. Why pretend?

PART IV

I

In the boarding-house, whence the Lairds had not yet removed, the old lady who knitted, sat by the fireplace, and light from the setting sun threw her shadow on the wall, moving spidery and grey, over the yellowish distemper, in time to the tune of her needles. She was a very old lady—the oldest lady in the world, Noel thought—and she knitted without stopping, without breathing, so that the girl felt inclined to scream. In the evening when George and Gratian were not in, Noel would often sit watching the needles, brooding over her as yet undecided future. And now and again the old lady would look up above her spectacles; move the corners of her lips ever so slightly, and drop her gaze again. She had pitted herself against Fate; so long as she knitted, the war could not stop—such was the conclusion Noel had come to. This old lady knitted the epic of acquiescence to the tune of her needles; it was she who kept the war going—such a thin old lady! 'If I were to hold her elbows from behind,' the girl used to think, 'I believe she'd die. I expect I ought to; then the war would stop. And if the war stopped, there'd be love and life again.' Then the little silvery tune would click itself once more into her brain, and stop her thinking. In her lap this evening lay a letter from her father.

"My dearest Nollie,

"I am glad to say I have my chaplaincy, and am to start for Egypt very soon. I should have wished to go to France, but must take what I can get, in view of my age, for they really don't want us who are getting on, I fear. It is a great comfort to me to think that Gratian is with you, and no doubt you will all soon be in a house where my little grandson can join you. I have excellent accounts of him in a letter from your aunt, just received. My child, you must never again think that my resignation has been due to you. It is not so. You know, or perhaps you don't, that ever since the war broke out, I have chafed over staying at home, my heart has been with our boys out there,

and sooner or later it must have come to this, apart from anything else. Monsieur Lavendie has been round in the evening, twice; he is a nice man, I like him very much, in spite of our differences of view. He wanted to give me the sketch he made of you in the Park, but what can I do with it now? And to tell you the truth, I like it no better than the oil painting. It is not a likeness, as I know you. I hope I didn't hurt his feelings, the feelings of an artist are so very easily wounded. There is one thing I must tell you. Leila has gone back to South Africa; she came round one evening about ten days ago, to say good-bye. She was very brave, for I fear it means a great wrench for her. I hope and pray she may find comfort and tranquillity out there. And now, my dear, I want you to promise me not to see Captain Fort. I know that he admires you. But, apart from the question of his conduct in regard to Leila, he made the saddest impression on me by coming to our house the very day after her departure. There is something about that which makes me feel he cannot be the sort of man in whom I could feel any confidence. I don't suppose for a moment that he is in your thoughts, and yet before going so far from you, I feel I must warn you. I should rejoice to see you married to a good man; but, though I don't wish to think hardly of anyone, I cannot believe Captain Fort is that.

"I shall come down to you before I start, which may be in quite a short time now. My dear, love to you and Gracie, and best wishes to George.

"Your ever loving father,
"Edward Pierson."

Across this letter lying on her knees, Noel gazed at the spidery movement on the wall. Was it acquiescence that the old lady knitted, or was it resistance—a challenge to death itself, a challenge dancing to the tune of the needles like the grey ghost of human resistance to Fate! She wouldn't give in, this oldest lady in the world, she meant to knit till she fell into the grave. And so Leila had gone! It hurt her to know that; and yet it pleased her. Acquiescence—resistance! Why did Daddy always want to choose the way she should go? So gentle he was, yet he always wanted to! And why did he always make her feel that she must go the other way? The sunlight ceased to stream in, the old lady's shadow faded off the wall, but the needles still sang their little tune. And the girl said:

"Do you enjoy knitting, Mrs. Adam?"

The old lady looked at her above the spectacles.

"Enjoy, my dear? It passes the time."

"But do you want the time to pass?"

There was no answer for a moment, and Noel thought: 'How dreadful of me to have said that!'

"Eh?" said the old lady.

"I said: Isn't it very tiring?"

"Not when I don't think about it, my dear."

"What do you think about?"

The old lady cackled gently.

"Oh—well!" she said.

And Noel thought: 'It must be dreadful to grow old, and pass the time!'

She took up her father's letter, and bent it meditatively against her chin. He wanted *her* to pass the time—not to live, not to enjoy! To pass the time. What else had he been doing himself, all these years, ever since she could remember, ever since her mother died, but just passing the time? Passing the time because he did not believe in this life; not living at all, just preparing for the life he did believe in. Denying himself everything that was exciting and nice, so that when he died he might pass pure and saintly to his other world. He could not believe Captain Fort a good man, because he had not passed the time, and resisted Leila; and Leila was gone! And now it was a sin for him to love someone else; he must pass the time again. 'Daddy doesn't believe in life,' she thought; 'it's *monsieur's* picture. Daddy's a saint; but I don't want to be a saint, and pass the time. He doesn't mind making people unhappy, because the more they're repressed, the saintlier they'll be. But I can't bear to be unhappy, or to see others unhappy. I wonder if I could bear to be unhappy to save someone else—as Leila is? I admire her! Oh! I admire her! She's not doing it because she thinks it good for her soul; only because she can't bear making him unhappy. She must love him very much. Poor Leila! And she's done it all by herself, of her own accord.' It was like what George said of the soldiers; they didn't know why they were heroes, it was not because they'd been told to be, or because they believed in a future life. They just had to be, from inside somewhere, to save others. 'And they love life as much as I do,' she thought. 'What a beast it makes one feel!' Those needles! Resistance—acquiescence? Both perhaps. The

oldest lady in the world, with her lips moving at the corners, keeping things in, had lived her life, and knew it. How dreadful to live on when you were of no more interest to anyone, but must just " pass the time " and die. But how much more dreadful to " pass the time " when you were strong, and life and love were yours for the taking! 'I shan't answer Daddy,' she thought.

II

The maid, who one Saturday in July opened the door to Jimmy Fort, had never heard the name of Laird, for she was but a unit in the ceaseless procession which pass through the boarding-houses of places subject to air-raids. Placing him in a sitting-room, she said she would find Miss 'Allow. There he waited, turning the leaves of an illustrated journal, wherein Society beauties, starving Servians, actresses with pretty legs, prize dogs, sinking ships, Royalties, shells bursting, and padres reading funeral services, testified to the catholicity of the public taste, but did not assuage his nerves. What if their address were not known here? Why, in his fear of putting things to the test, had he let this month go by? An old lady was sitting by the hearth, knitting, the click of whose needles blended with the buzzing of a large bee on the window-pane. 'She may know,' he thought, 'she looks as if she'd been here for ever.' And approaching her, he said:

"I can assure you those socks are very much appreciated, ma'am."

The old lady bridled over her spectacles.

"It passes the time," she said.

"Oh, more than that; it helps to win the war, ma'am."

The old lady's lips moved at the corners; she did not answer. 'Deaf!' he thought.

"May I ask if you knew my friends, Doctor and Mrs. Laird, and Miss Pierson?"

The old lady cackled gently.

"Oh, yes! A pretty young girl; as pretty as life. She used to sit with me. Quite a pleasure to watch her; such large eyes she had."

"Where have they gone? Can you tell me?"

"Oh, I don't know at all."

It was a little cold douche on his heart. He longed to say: 'Stop knitting a minute, please. It's my life, to know. But the tune of the needles answered: 'It's my life to knit.' And he turned away to the window.

"She used to sit just there; quite still, *quite* still."

Fort looked down at the window-seat. So, she used to sit just here, quite still.

"What a dreadful war this is!" said the old lady. "Have you been at the front?"

"Yes."

"To think of the poor young girls who'll never have husbands! I'm sure I think it's dreadful."

"Yes," said Fort; "it's dreadful." And then a voice from the doorway said:

"Did you want Doctor and Mrs. Laird, sir? East Bungalow their address is; it's a little way out on the North Road. Anyone will tell you."

With a sigh of relief Fort looked gratefully at the old lady who had called Noel as pretty as life. "Good afternoon, ma'am."

"Good afternoon." The needles clicked, and little movements occurred at the corners of her mouth. Fort went out. He could not find a vehicle, and was a long time walking. The Bungalow was ugly, of yellow brick pointed with red. It lay about two-thirds up between the main road and cliffs, and had a rock-garden and a glaring brand-new look, in the afternoon sunlight. He opened the gate, uttering one of those prayers which come so glibly from unbelievers when they want anything. A baby's crying answered it, and he thought with ecstasy: 'Heaven, she *is* here!' Passing the rock-garden he could see a lawn at the back of the house and a perambulator out there under a helm-oak tree, and Noel—surely Noel herself! Hardening his heart, he went forward. In a lilac sunbonnet she was bending over the perambulator. He trod softly on the grass, and was quite close before she heard him. He had prepared no words, but just held out his hand. The baby, interested in the shadow falling across its pram, ceased crying. Noel took his hand. Under the sunbonnet, which hid her hair, she seemed older and paler, as if she felt the heat. He had no feeling that she was glad to see him.

"How do you do? Have you seen Gratian; she ought to be in."

"I didn't come to see her; I came to see you."

Noel turned to the baby.

"Here he is."

Fort stood at the end of the perambulator, and looked at that other fellow's baby. In the shade of the hood, with the frilly clothes, it seemed to him lying with its head down-hill. It had

scratched its snub nose and bumpy forehead, and it stared up at its mother with blue eyes, which seemed to have no underlids so fat were its cheeks.

"I wonder what they think about," he said.

Noel put her finger into the baby's fist.

"They only think when they want something."

"That's a deep saying: but his eyes are awfully interested in you."

Noel smiled; and very slowly the baby's curly mouth unclosed, and discovered his toothlessness.

"He's a darling," she said in a whisper.

'And so are you,' he thought, 'if only I dared say it!'

"Daddy is here," she said suddenly, without looking up. "He's sailing for Egypt the day after to-morrow. He doesn't like you."

Fort's heart gave a jump. Why did she tell him that, unless —unless he was just a little on his side?

"I expected that," he said. "I'm a sinner, as you know."

Noel looked up at him. "Sin!" she said, and bent again over her baby. The word, the tone in which she said it, crouching over her baby, gave him the thought: 'If it weren't for that little creature, I shouldn't have a dog's chance.' He said, "I'll go and see your father. Is he in?"

"I think so."

"May I come to-morrow?"

"It's Sunday; and Daddy's last day."

"Ah! Of course." He did not dare look back, to see if her gaze was following him, but he thought: 'Chance or no chance, I'm going to fight for her tooth and nail.'

In a room darkened against the evening sun Pierson was sitting on a sofa reading. The sight of that figure in khaki disconcerted Fort, who had not realised that there would be this metamorphosis. The narrow face, clean-shaven now, with its deep-set eyes and compressed lips, looked more priestly than ever, in spite of this brown garb. He felt his hope suddenly to be very forlorn indeed. And rushing at the fence, he began abruptly:

"I've come to ask you, sir, for your permission to marry Noel, if she will have me."

He had thought Pierson's face gentle; it was not gentle now. "Did you know I was here, then, Captain Fort?"

"I saw Noel in the garden. I've said nothing to her, of

course. But she told me you were starting to-morrow for Egypt, so I shall have no other chance."

"I am sorry you have come. It is not for me to judge, but I don't think you will make Noel happy."

"May I ask you why, sir?"

"Captain Fort, the world's judgment of these things is not mine; but since you ask me, I will tell you frankly. My cousin Leila has a claim on you. It is her you should ask to marry you."

"I did ask her; she refused."

"I know. She would not refuse you again if you went out to her."

"I am not free to go out to her; besides, she *would* refuse. She knows I don't love her, and never have."

"Never have?"

"No."

"Then why——"

"Because I'm a man, I suppose, and a fool."

"If it was simply, 'because you are a man' as you call it, it is clear that no principle or faith governs you. And yet you ask me to give you Noel; my poor Noel, who wants the love and protection not of a 'man' but of a good man. No, Captain Fort, no!"

Fort bit his lips. "I'm clearly not a good man in your sense of the word; but I love her terribly, and I would protect her. I don't in the least know whether she'll have me. I don't expect her to, naturally. But I warn you that I mean to ask her, and to wait for her. I'm so much in love that I can do nothing else."

"The man who is truly in love does what is best for the one he loves." Fort bent his head; he felt as if he were at school again, confronting his head-master. "That's true," he said. "And I shall never trade on her position. If she can't feel anything for me now or in the future, I shan't trouble her, you may be sure of that. But if by some wonderful chance she should, I know I can make her happy, sir."

"She is a child."

"No, she's not a child," said Fort stubbornly.

Pierson touched the lapel of his new tunic. "Captain Fort, I am going far away from her, and leaving her without protection. I trust to your chivalry not to ask her, till I come back."

Fort threw back his head. "No, no, I won't accept that posi-

tion. With or without your presence the facts will be the same. Either she can love me, or she can't. If she can, she'll be happier with me. If she can't, there's an end of it."

Pierson came slowly up to him. "In my view," he said, "you are as bound to Leila as if you were married to her."

"You can't expect me to take the priest's view, sir."

Pierson's lips trembled.

"You call it a priest's view; I think it is only the view of a man of honour."

Fort reddened. "That's for my conscience," he said stubbornly. "I can't tell you, and I'm not going to, how things began. I was a fool. But I did my best, and I *know* that Leila doesn't think I'm bound. If she had, she would never have gone. When there's no feeling—there never was real feeling on my side—and when there's this terribly real feeling for Noel, which I never sought, which I tried to keep down, which I ran away from——"

"Did you?"

"Yes. To go on with the other was foul. I should have thought you might have seen that, sir; but I did go on with it. It was Leila who made an end."

"Leila behaved nobly, I think."

"She was splendid; but that doesn't make me a brute."

Pierson turned away to the window, whence he must see Noel.

"It is repugnant to me," he said. "Is there never to be any purity in her life?"

"Is there never to be any *life* for her? At your rate, sir, there will be none. I'm no worse than other men, and I love her more than they could."

For fully a minute Pierson stood silent, before he said: "Forgive me if I've spoken harshly. I didn't mean to. I love her intensely; I wish for nothing but her good. But all my life I have believed that for a man there is only one woman—for a woman only one man."

"Then, sir," Fort burst out, "you wish her——"

Pierson had put his hand up, as if to ward off a blow; and, angry though he was, Fort stopped.

"We are all made of flesh and blood," he continued coldly, "and it seems to me that you think we aren't."

"We have spirits too, Captain Fort." The voice was suddenly so gentle that Fort's anger evaporated.

"I have a great respect for you, sir; but a greater love for

Noel, and nothing in this world will prevent me trying to give my life to her."

A smile quivered over Pierson's face. "If you try, then I can but pray that you will fail."

Fort did not answer, and went out.

He walked slowly away from the bungalow, with his head down, sore, angry, and yet—relieved. He knew where he stood; nor did he feel that he had been worsted—those strictures had not touched him. Convicted of immorality, he remained conscious of private justifications, in a way that human beings have. Only one little corner of memory, unseen and uncriticised by his opponent, troubled him. He pardoned himself the rest; the one thing he did not pardon was the fact that he had known Noel before his liaison with Leila commenced; had even let Leila sweep him away on an evening when he had been in Noel's company. For that he felt a real disgust with himself. And all the way back to the station he kept thinking: 'How could I? I deserve to lose her! Still, I shall try; but not now—not yet!' And, wearily enough, he took the train back to town.

III

Both girls rose early that last day, and went with their father to Communion. As Gratian had said to George: "It's nothing to me now, but it will mean a lot to him out there, as a memory of us. So I must go." And he had answered: "Quite right, my dear. Let him have all he can get of you both to-day. I'll keep out of the way, and be back the last thing at night." Their father's smile when he saw them waiting for him went straight to both their hearts. It was a delicious day, and the early freshness had not yet dried out of the air, when they were walking home to breakfast. Each girl had slipped a hand under his arm. 'It's like Moses or was it Aaron?' Noel thought absurdly. Memory had complete hold of her. All the old days! Nursery hours on Sundays after tea, stories out of the huge Bible bound in mother-o'-pearl, with photogravures of the Holy Land—palms, and hills, and goats, and little Eastern figures, and funny boats on the Sea of Galilee, and camels—always camels. The book would be on his knee, and they one on each arm of his chair, waiting eagerly for the pages to be turned so that a new picture came. And there would be the feel of his cheek, prickly against theirs; and the old names with the old glamour—to Gratian, Joshua, Daniel, Mordecai, Peter; to Noel Absalom because of his hair, and Haman because she liked the sound, and Ruth because she was pretty and John because he leaned on Jesus' breast. Neither of them cared for Job or David, and Elijah and Elisha they detested because they hated the name Eliza. And later days by firelight in the drawing-room, roasting chestnuts just before evening church, and telling ghost stories, and trying to make Daddy eat his share. And hours beside him at the piano, each eager for her special hymns—for Gratian, "Onward, Christian Soldiers," "Lead, Kindly Light," and "O God Our Help"; for Noel, "Nearer, My God to Thee," the one with "The Hosts of Midian" in it, and "For Those in Peril on the Sea." And carols! Ah! And Choristers! Noel had loved one deeply—the word "chorister" was so enchanting; and because of his whiteness, and hair which had no grease on it, but stood up all bright; she had never spoken to him—a far worship, like that for a star. And always, always Daddy had

been gentle; sometimes angry, but always gentle; and they—sometimes not at all! And mixed up with it all, the dogs they had had, and the cats they had had, and the cockatoo, and the governesses, and their red cloaks, and the curates, and the pantomimes, and "Peter Pan," and "Alice in Wonderland"—Daddy sitting between them, so that one could snuggle up. And later, the school-days, the hockey, the prizes, the holidays, the rush into his arms; and the great and wonderful yearly exodus to far places, fishing and bathing; walks and drives; rides and climbs, always with him. And concerts and Shakespeare plays in the Christmas and Easter holidays; and the walk home through the streets—all lighted in those days—one on each side of him. And this was the end! They waited on him at breakfast: they kept stealing glances at him, photographing him in their minds. Gratian got her camera and did actually photograph him in the morning sunlight with Noel, without Noel, with the baby; against all regulations for the defence of the realm. It was Noel who suggested: "Daddy, let's take lunch out and go for all day on the cliffs, us three, and forget there's a war."

So easy to say, so difficult to do, with the boom of the guns travelling to their ears along the grass, mingled with the buzz of insects. Yet that hum of summer, the innumerable voices of tiny lives, gossamer things all as alive as they, and as important to their frail selves; and the white clouds, few and so slow-moving, and the remote strange purity which clings to the chalky downs, all this white and green and blue of land and sea had its peace, which crept into the spirits of those three alone with Nature, this once more, the last time for—who could say how long? They talked, by tacit agreement, of nothing but what had happened before the war began, while the flock of the blown dandelions drifted past. Pierson sat cross-legged on the grass, without his cap, suffering a little still from the stiffness of his unwonted garments. And the girls lay one on each side of him, half critical, and half admiring. Noel could not bear his collar.

"If you had a soft collar you'd be lovely, Daddy. Perhaps out there they'll let you take it off. It must be fearfully hot in Egypt. Oh! I wish I were going. I wish I were going everywhere in the world. Some day!" Presently he read to them, Murray's "Hippolytus" of Euripides. And now and then Gratian and he discussed a passage. But Noel lay silent, looking

at the sky. Whenever his voice ceased, there was the song of the larks, and very faint, the distant mutter of the guns.

They stayed up there till past six, and it was time to go and have tea before Evening Service. Those hours in the baking sun had drawn virtue out of them; they were silent and melancholy all the evening. Noel was the first to go up to her bedroom. She went without saying good night—she knew her father would come to her room that last evening. George had not yet come in; and Gratian was left alone with Pierson in the drawing-room, round whose single lamp, in spite of close-drawn curtains, moths were circling. She moved over to him on the sofa.

"Dad, promise me not to worry about Nollie; we'll take care of her."

"She can only take care of herself, Gracie, and will she? Did you know that Captain Fort was here yesterday?"

"She told me."

"What is her feeling about him?"

"I don't think she knows. Nollie dreams along, and then suddenly rushes."

"I wish she were safe from that man."

"But, Dad, why? George likes him and so do I."

A big grey moth was fluttering against the lamp. Pierson got up and caught it in the curve of his palm. "Poor thing! You're like my Nollie; so soft, and dreamy, so feckless, so reckless." And going to the curtains, he thrust his hand through, and released the moth.

"Dad!" said Gratian suddenly, "we can only find out for ourselves, even if we do singe our wings in doing it. We've been reading James's 'Pragmatism.' George says the only chapter that's important is missing—the one on ethics, to show that what we do is not wrong till it's proved wrong by the result. I suppose he was afraid to deliver that lecture."

Pierson's face wore the smile which always came on it when he had to deal with George, the smile which said: "Ah, George, that's very clever; but *I know.*"

"My dear," he said, "that doctrine is the most dangerous in the world. I am surprised at George."

"I don't think George is in danger, Dad."

"George is a man of wide experience and strong judgment and character; but think how fatal it would be for Nollie, my poor Nollie, whom a little gust can blow into the candle."

"All the same," said Gratian stubbornly, "I don't think anyone can be good or worth anything unless they judge for themselves and take risks."

Pierson went close to her; his face was quivering.

"Don't let us differ on this last night; I must go up to Nollie for a minute, and then to bed. I shan't see you to-morrow; you mustn't get up; I can bear parting better like this. And my train goes at eight. God bless you, Gracie; give George my love. I know, I have always known that he's a good man, though we do fight so. Good-bye, my darling."

He went out with his cheeks wet from Gratian's tears, and stood in the porch a minute to recover his composure. The shadow of the house stretched velvet and blunt over the rock-garden. A night-jar was spinning; the churring sound affected him oddly. The last English night-bird he would hear. England! What a night—to say good-bye! 'My country!' he thought; 'my beautiful country!' The dew was lying thick and silvery already on the little patch of grass—the last dew, the last scent of an English night. The call of a bugle floated out. "England!" he prayed; "God be about you!" A little sound answered from across the grass, like an old man's cough, and the scrape and rattle of a chain. A face emerged at the edge of the house's shadow; bearded and horned like that of Pan, it seemed to stare at him. And he saw the dim grey form of the garden goat, heard it scuttle round the stake to which it was tethered, as though alarmed at this visitor to its domain.

He went up the half-flight of stairs to Noel's narrow little room, next the nursery. No voice answered his tap. It was dark, but he could see her at the window, leaning far out, with her chin on her hands.

"Nollie!"

She answered without turning: "Such a lovely night, Daddy. Come and look! I'd like to set the goat free, only he'd eat the rock plants. But it is his night, isn't it? He ought to be running and skipping in it. It's such a shame to tie things up. Did you never feel wild in your heart, Daddy?"

"Always, I think, Nollie; too wild. It's been hard to tame oneself."

Noel slipped her hand through his arm. "Let's go and take the goat and skip together on the hills. If only we had a penny whistle! Did you hear the bugle? The bugle and the goat!"

Pierson pressed the hand against him.

"Nollie, be good while I'm away. You know what I don't want. I told you in my letter." He looked at her cheek, and dared say no more. Her face had its "fey" look again.

"Don't you feel," she said suddenly, "on a night like this, all the things, all the things—the stars have lives, Daddy, and the moon has a big life, and the shadows have, and the moths and the birds and the goats and the trees, and the flowers, and all of us—escaped? Oh! Daddy, why is there a war? And why are people so bound and so unhappy? Don't tell me it's God—don't!"

Pierson could not answer, for there came into his mind the Greek song he had been reading aloud that afternoon:

> "O for a deep and dewy Spring,
> With runlets cold to draw and drink,
> And a great meadow blossoming,
> Long-grassed, and poplars in a ring,
> To rest me by the brink.
> O take me to the mountain, O,
> Past the great pines and through the wood,
> Up where the lean hounds softly go,
> A-whine for wild things' blood,
> And madly flies the dappled roe,
> O God, to shout and speed them there;
> An arrow by my chestnut hair
> Drawn tight and one keen glimmering spear—
> Ah! if I could!"

All that in life had been to him unknown, of venture and wild savour; all the emotion he had stifled; the swift Pan he had denied; the sharp fruits, the burning suns, the dark pools, the unearthly moonlight, which were not of God—all came with the breath of that old song, and the look on the girl's face. And he covered his eyes.

Noel's hand tugged at his arm. "Isn't beauty terribly alive," she murmured, "like a lovely person? it makes you ache to kiss it."

His lips felt parched. "There is a beauty beyond all that," he said stubbornly.

"Where?"

"Holiness, duty, faith. O Nollie, my love!" But Noel's hand tightened on his arm.

"Shall I tell you what I should like?" she whispered. "To take God's hand and show Him things. I'm certain He's not seen everything."

A shudder went through Pierson, one of those queer sudden shivers, which come from a strange note in a voice, or a new sharp scent or sight.

"My dear, what things you say!"

"But He hasn't, and it's time He did. We'd creep, and peep, and see it all for once, as He can't in His churches. Daddy, oh! Daddy! I can't bear it any more; to think of them being killed on a night like this; killed and killed so that they never see it all again—never see it—never see it!" She sank down, and covered her face with her arms.

"I can't, I can't! Oh! take it all away, the cruelty! Why does it come—why the stars and the flowers, if God doesn't care any more than that?"

Horribly affected he stood bending over her, stroking her head. Then the habit of a hundred death-beds helped him. "Come, Nollie! This life is but a minute. We must all die."

"But not they—not so young!" She clung to his knees, and looked up. "Daddy, I don't want you to go; promise me to come back!"

The childishness of those words brought back his balance.

"My dear sweetheart, of course! Come, Nollie, get up. The sun's been too much for you."

Noel got up, and put her hands on her father's shoulders. "Forgive me for all my badness, and all my badness to come, especially all my badness to come!"

Pierson smiled. "I shall always forgive you, Nollie; but there won't be—there mustn't be—any badness to come. I pray God to keep you, and make you like your mother."

"Mother never had a devil, like you and me."

He was silent from surprise. How did this child know the devil of wild feeling he had fought against year after year, until with the many years he had felt it weakening within him!

She whispered on: "I don't hate my devil. Why should I?—it's part of me. Every day when the sun sets, I'll think of you, Daddy; and you might do the same—that'll keep me good. I shan't come to the station to-morrow, I should only cry. And I shan't say good-bye now. It's unlucky."

She flung her arms round him; and half smothered by that fervent embrace, he kissed her cheeks and hair. Freed of each other at last, he stood for a moment looking at her by the moonlight.

"There never was anyone more loving than you, Nollie!"

he said quietly. "Remember my letter. And good night, my love!" Then, afraid to stay another second, he went quickly out of the dark little room. . . .

George Laird, returning half an hour later, heard a voice saying softly: "George, George!"

Looking up, he saw a little white blur at the window, and Noel's face just visible.

"George, let the goat loose, just for to-night, to please me."

Something in that voice, and in the gesture of her stretched-out arm moved George in a queer way, although, as Pierson had once said, he had no music in his soul. He loosed the goat.

IV

1 §

In the weeks which succeeded Pierson's departure, Gratian and George often discussed Noel's conduct and position by the light of the Pragmatic theory. George held a suitably scientific view. Just as—he would point out to his wife—in the physical world, creatures who diverged from the normal had to justify their divergence in competition with their environments, or else go under, so in the ethical world it was all a question of whether Nollie could make good her vagary. If she could, and grew in strength of character thereby, it was ipso facto all right, her vagary would be proved an advantage, and the world enriched. If not, the world by her failure to make good would be impoverished, and her vagary proved wrong. The orthodox and academic—he insisted—were always forgetting the adaptability of living organisms; how every action which was out of the ordinary, unconsciously modified all the other actions together with the outlook, and philosophy of the doer. "Of course Nollie was crazy," he said, "but when she did what she did, she at once began to think differently about life and morals. The deepest instinct we all have is the instinct that we must do what we must, and think that what we've done is really all right; in fact the instinct of self-preservation. We're all fighting animals; and we feel in our bones that if we admit we're beaten—we *are* beaten; but that every fight we win, especially against odds, hardens those bones. But personally I don't think she can make good on her own."

Gratian, whose Pragmatism was not yet fully baked, responded doubtfully:

"No, I don't think she can. And if she could I'm not sure. But isn't Pragmatism a perfectly beastly word, George? It has no sense of humour in it at all."

"It is a bit thick, and in the hands of the young, deuced likely to become Prigmatism; but not with Nollie."

They watched the victim of their discussions with real anxiety. The knowledge that she would never be more sheltered than she was with them, at all events until she married, gravely

impeded the formation of any judgment as to whether or no she could make good. Now and again there would come to Gratian—who after all knew her sister better than George—the disquieting thought that whatever conclusion Noel led them to form, she would almost certainly force them to abandon sooner or later.

Three days after her father's departure Noel had declared that she wanted to work on the land. This George had promptly vetoed.

"You aren't strong enough yet, my dear. Wait till the harvest begins. Then you can go and help on the farm here. If you can stand that without damage, we'll think about it."

But the weather was wet and harvest late, and Noel had nothing much to do but attend to her baby, already well attended to by Nurse, and dream and brood, and now and then cook an omelette or do some housework for the sake of a gnawing conscience. Since Gratian and George were away in hospital all day, she was very much alone. Several times in the evenings Gratian tried to come at the core of her thoughts. Twice she flew the kite of Leila. The first time Noel only answered: "Yes, she's a brick." The second time, she said: "I don't want to think about her."

But, hardening her heart, Gratian went on: "Don't you think it's queer we've never heard from Captain Fort since he came down?"

In her calmest voice Noel answered: "Why should we, after being told that he wasn't liked?"

"Who told him that?"

"I told him, that Daddy didn't; but I expect Daddy said much worse things." She gave a little laugh, then softly added: "Daddy's wonderful, isn't he?"

"How?"

"The way he drives one to do the other thing. If he hadn't opposed my marriage to Cyril, you know, *that* wouldn't have happened, it just made all the difference. It stirred me up so fearfully." Gratian stared at her, astonished that she could see herself so clearly. Towards the end of August she had a letter from Fort.

"Dear Mrs. Laird,

"You know all about things, of course, except the one thing which to me is all important. I can't go on without knowing

whether I have a chance with your sister. It is against your father's expressed wish that she should have anything to do with me, but I told him that I could not and would not promise not to ask her. I get my holiday at the end of this month, and am coming down to put it to the touch. It means more to me than you can possibly imagine.

"I am, dear Mrs. Laird,
"Your very faithful servant,
"JAMES FORT."

She discussed the letter with George, whose advice was: "Answer it politely, but say nothing; and nothing to Nollie. I think it would be a very good thing. Of course it's a bit of a makeshift—twice her age; but he's a genuine man, if not exactly brilliant."

Gratian answered almost sullenly: "I've always wanted the very best for Nollie."

George screwed up his steel-coloured eyes, as he might have looked at one on whom he had to operate. "Quite so," he said. "But you must remember, Gracie, that out of the swan she was, Nollie has made herself into a lame duck. Fifty per cent at least is off her value, socially. We must look at things as they are."

"Father is dead against it."

George smiled, on the point of saying: 'That makes me feel it must be a good thing.' But he subdued the impulse.

"I agree that we're bound by his absence not to further it actively. Still Nollie knows his wishes, and it's up to her and no one else. After all, she's no longer a child."

His advice was followed. But to write that polite letter, which said nothing, cost Gratian a sleepless night, and two or three hours' penmanship. She was very conscientious. Knowledge of this impending visit increased the anxiety with which she watched her sister, but the only inkling she obtained of Noel's state of mind was when the girl showed her a letter she had received from Thirza, asking her to come back to Kestrel. A postscript, in Uncle Bob's handwriting, added these words:

"We're getting quite fossilised down here; Eve's gone and left us again. We miss you and the youngster awfully. Come along down, Nollie—there's a dear!"

"They're darlings," Noel said, "but I shan't go. I'm too restless, ever since Daddy went; you don't know how restless. This rain simply makes me want to die."

2 §

The weather improved next day, and at the end of that week harvest began. By what seemed to Noel a stroke of luck the farmer's binder was broken; he could not get it repaired, and wanted all the human binders he could get. That first day in the fields blistered her hands, burnt her face and neck, made every nerve and bone in her body ache; but was the happiest day she had spent for weeks, the happiest perhaps since Cyril Morland left her, over a year ago. She had a bath and went to bed the moment she got in.

Lying there nibbling chocolates and smoking a cigarette, she luxuriated in the weariness which had stilled her dreadful restlessness. Watching the smoke of her cigarette curl up against the sunset glow which filled her window, she mused: If only she could be tired out like this every day! She would be all right then, would lose the feeling of not knowing what she wanted, of being in a sort of large box, with the lid slammed down, roaming round it like a dazed and homesick bee in an overturned tumbler; the feeling of being only half alive, of having a wing maimed so that she could only fly a little way, and must then drop.

She slept like a top that night. But the next day's work was real torture, and the third not much better. By the end of the week, however, she was no longer stiff.

Saturday was cloudless; a perfect day. The field she was working in lay on a slope. It was the last field to be cut, and the best wheat yet, with a glorious burnt shade in its gold and the ears blunt and full. She had got used now to the feel of the great sheaves in her arms, and the binding wisps drawn through her hand till she held them level, below the ears, ready for the twist. There was no new sensation in it now; just steady, rather dreamy work, to keep her place in the row, to the swish-swish of the cutter and the call of the driver to his horses at the turns; with continual little pauses, to straighten and rest her back a moment, and shake her head free from the flies, or suck her finger, sore from the constant pushing of the straw ends under. So the hours went on, rather hot and wearisome, yet with a

feeling of something good being done, of a job getting surely to its end. And gradually the centre patch narrowed, and the sun slowly slanted down.

When they stopped for tea, instead of running home as usual, she drank it cold out of a flask she had brought, ate a bun and some chocolate, and lay down on her back against the hedge. She always avoided that group of her fellow workers round the tea-cans which the farmer's wife brought out. To avoid people, if she could, had become habitual to her now. They must know about her, or would soon if she gave them the chance. She had never lost consciousness of her ring-finger, expecting every eye to fall on it as a matter of course. Lying on her face, she puffed her cigarette into the grass, and watched a beetle, till one of the sheep-dogs, scouting for scraps, came up, and she fed him with her second bun. Having finished the bun, he tried to eat the beetle, and, when she rescued it, convinced that she had nothing more to give him, sneezed at her, and went away. Pressing the end of her cigarette out against the bank, she turned over. Already the driver was perched on his tiny seat, and his companion, whose business it was to free the falling corn, was getting up alongside. Swish—swish! It had begun again. She rose, stretched herself, and went back to her place in the row. The field would be finished to-night; she would have a lovely rest—all Sunday! Towards seven o'clock a narrow strip, not twenty yards broad, alone was left. This last half hour was what Noel dreaded. To-day it was worse, for the farmer had no cartridges left, and the rabbits were dealt with by hullabaloo and sticks and chasing dogs. Rabbits were vermin, of course, and ate the crops, and must be killed; besides, they were good food, and fetched two shillings apiece; all this she knew—but to see the poor frightened things stealing out, pounced on, turned, shouted at, chased, rolled over by great swift dogs, fallen on by the boys and killed and carried with their limp grey bodies upside down, so dead and soft and helpless, always made her feel quite sick. She stood very still, trying not to see or hear, and in the corn opposite to her a rabbit stole along, crouched, and peeped. 'Oh!' she thought, 'come out here, bunny. I'll let you away—can't you see I will? It's your only chance. Come out!' But the rabbit crouched, and gazed, with its little cowed head poked forward, and its ears laid flat; it seemed trying to understand whether this still thing in front of it was the same as those others. With the thought, 'Of course

it won't while I look at it,' Noel turned her head away. Out of the corner of her eye she could see a man standing a few yards off. The rabbit bolted out. Now the man would shout and turn it. But he did not, and the rabbit scuttled past him and away to the hedge. She heard a shout from the end of the row, saw a dog galloping. Too late! Hurrah! And clasping her hands, she looked at the man. It was Fort! With the queerest feeling—amazement, pleasure, the thrill of conspiracy, she saw him coming up to her.

"I did want that rabbit to get off," she sighed out; "I've been watching it. Thank you!"

He looked at her. "My goodness!" was all he said.

Noel's hands flew up to her cheeks. "Yes, I know; is my nose very red?"

"No; you're as lovely as Ruth, if she was lovely."

Swish—swish! The cutter came by; Noel started forward to her place in the row; but catching her arm, he said: "No, let me do this little bit. I haven't had a day in the fields since the war began. Talk to me while I'm binding."

She stood watching him. He made a different, stronger twist from hers, and took larger sheaves, so that she felt a sort of jealousy.

"I didn't know you knew about this sort of thing."

"Oh, Lord, yes! I had a farm once out West. Nothing like field-work, to make you feel good. I've been watching you; you bind jolly well."

Noel gave a sigh of pleasure.

"Where have you come from?" she asked.

"Straight from the station. I'm on my holiday." He looked up at her, and they both fell silent.

Swish—swish! The cutter was coming again. Noel went to the beginning of her portion of the falling corn, he to the end of it. They worked towards each other, and met before the cutter was on them a third time.

"Will you come in to supper?"

"I'd love to."

"Then let's go now, please. I don't want to see any more rabbits killed."

They spoke very little on the way to the bungalow, but she felt his eyes on her all the time. She left him with George and Gratian who had just come in, and went up for her bath.

Supper had been laid out in the verandah, and it was nearly

dark before they had finished. In rhyme with the failing of the light Noel became more and more silent. When they went in, she ran up to her baby. She did not go down again, but as on the night before her father went away, stood at her window, leaning out. A dark night, no moon; in the starlight she could only just see the dim garden, where no goat was grazing. Now that her first excitement had worn off, this sudden reappearance of Fort filled her with nervous melancholy. She knew perfectly well what he had come for, she had always known. She had no certain knowledge of her own mind; but she knew that all these weeks she had been between his influence and her father's, listening to them, as it were, pleading with her. And, curiously, the pleading of each, instead of drawing her towards the pleader, had seemed dragging her away from him, driving her into the arms of the other. To the protection of one or the other she felt she must go; and it humiliated her to think that in all the world there was no other place for her. The wildness of that one night in the old Abbey seemed to have power to govern all her life to come. Why should that one night, that one act, have this uncanny power to drive her this way or that, to those arms or these? Must she, because of it, always need protection? Standing there in the dark it was almost as if they had come up behind her, with their pleadings; and a shiver ran down her back. She longed to turn on them, and cry out: "Go away; oh, go away! I don't want either of you; I just want to be left alone!" Then something, a moth perhaps, touched her neck. She gasped and shook herself. How silly!

She heard the back door round the corner of the house opening; a man's low voice down in the dark said:

"Who's the young lady that comes out in the fields?"

Another voice—one of the maids—answered:

"The Missis's sister."

"They say she's got a baby."

"Never you mind what she's got."

Noel heard the man's laugh. It seemed to her the most odious laugh she had ever heard. She thought swiftly and absurdly: 'I'll get away from all this.' The window was only a few feet up. She got out on to the ledge, let herself down, and dropped. There was a flower-bed below, quite soft, with a scent of geranium-leaves and earth. She brushed herself, and went tiptoeing across the gravel and the little front lawn, to the gate.

The house was quite dark, quite silent. She walked on, down the road. 'Jolly!' she thought. 'Night after night we sleep, and never see the nights: sleep until we're called, and never see anything. If they want to catch me they'll have to run.' And she began running down the road in her evening frock and shoes, with nothing on her head. She stopped after going perhaps three hundred yards, by the edge of the wood. It was splendidly dark in there, and she groped her way from trunk to trunk, with a delicious, half-scared sense of adventure and novelty. She stopped at last by a thin trunk whose bark glimmered faintly. She felt it with her cheek, quite smooth—a birch-tree; and, with her arms round it, she stood perfectly still. Wonderfully, magically silent, fresh and sweet-scented and dark! The little tree trembled suddenly within her arms, and she heard the low distant rumble, to which she had grown so accustomed—the guns, always at work, killing—killing men and killing trees, little trees perhaps like this within her arms, little trembling trees! Out there, in this dark night, there would not be a single unscarred tree like this smooth quivering thing, no fields of corn, not even a bush or a blade of grass, no leaves to rustle and smell sweet, not a bird, no little soft-footed night beasts, except the rats; and she shuddered, thinking of the Belgian soldier-painter. Holding the tree tight, she squeezed its smooth body against her. A rush of the same helpless, hopeless revolt and sorrow overtook her, which had wrung from her that passionate little outburst to her father, the night before he went away. Killed, torn, and bruised; burned, and killed, like Cyril! All the young things, like this little tree.

Rumble! Rumble! Quiver! Quiver! And all else so still, so sweet and still, and starry, up there through the leaves. . . . 'I can't bear it!' she thought. She pressed her lips, which the sun had warmed all day, against the satiny smooth bark. But the little tree stood within her arms insentient, quivering only to the long rumbles. With each of those dull mutterings, life and love were going out, like the flames of candles on a Christmas-tree, blown, one by one. To her eyes, accustomed by now to the darkness in there, the wood seemed slowly to be gathering a sort of life, as though it were a great thing watching her; a great thing with hundreds of limbs and eyes, and the power of breathing. The little tree, which had seemed so individual and friendly, ceased to be a comfort and became a part of the whole living wood, absorbed in itself, and coldly watching her, this

intruder of the mischievous breed, the fatal breed which loosed those rumblings on the earth. Noel unlocked her arms, and recoiled. A bough scraped her neck, some leaves flew against her eyes; she stepped aside, tripped over a root, and fell. A bough had hit her too, and she lay a little dazed, quivering at such dark unfriendliness. She held her hands up to her face for the mere pleasure of seeing something a little less dark; it was childish, and absurd, but she was frightened. The wood seemed to have so many eyes, so many arms, and all unfriendly; it seemed waiting to give her other blows, other falls, and to guard her within its darkness until——! She got up, moved a few steps, and stood still, she had forgotten from where she had come in. And afraid of moving deeper into the unfriendly wood, she turned slowly round, trying to tell which way to go. It was all just one dark watching thing, of limbs on the ground and in the air. 'Any way,' she thought; 'any way of course will take me out!' And she groped forward, keeping her hands up to guard her face. It was silly, but she could not help the sinking, scattered feeling which comes to one bushed, or lost in a fog. If the wood had not been so dark, so—alive! And for a second she had the senseless, terrifying thought of a child: 'What if I never get out!' Then she laughed at it, and stood still again, listening. There was no sound to guide her, no sound at all except that faint dull rumble, which seemed to come from every side, now. And the trees watched her. 'Ugh!' she thought; 'I hate this wood!' She saw it now, its snaky branches, its darkness, and great forms, as an abode of giants and witches. She groped and scrambled on again, tripped once more, and fell, hitting her forehead against a trunk. The blow dazed and sobered her. 'It's idiotic,' she thought; 'I'm a baby! I'll just walk very slowly till I reach the edge. I know it isn't a large wood!' She turned deliberately to face each direction; solemnly selected that from which the muttering of the guns seemed to come, and started again, moving very slowly with her hands stretched out. Something rustled in the undergrowth, quite close; she saw a pair of green eyes shining. Her heart jumped into her mouth. The thing sprang—there was a swish of ferns and twigs, and—silence. Noel clasped her breast. A poaching cat! And again she moved forward. But she had lost direction. 'I'm going round and round,' she thought. 'They always do.' And the sinking scattered feeling of the "bushed" clutched at her again. 'Shall I call?' she thought. 'I must be near the road. But it's

so babyish.' She moved on again. Her foot struck something soft. A voice muttered a thick oath; a hand seized her ankle. She leaped, and dragged and wrenched it free; and, utterly unnerved, she screamed, and ran forward blindly.

V

No one could have so convinced a feeling as Jimmy Fort that he would be a "bit of a makeshift" for Noel. He had spent the weeks after his interview with her father obsessed by her image, often saying to himself: "It won't do. It's playing it too low down to try and get that child, when I know that, but for her trouble, I shouldn't have a chance." He had never had much opinion of his looks, but now he seemed to himself absurdly old and dried-up in this desert of a London. He loathed the Office job to which they had put him, and the whole atmosphere of officialdom. Another year of it, and he would shrivel like an old apple! He began to look at himself anxiously, taking stock of his physical assets now that he had this dream of young beauty. He would be forty next month, and she was nineteen! But there would be times too when he would feel that, with her, he could be as much of a "three-year-old" as the youngster she had loved. Having little hope of winning her, he took her "past" but lightly. Was it not that past which gave him what chance he had? On two things he was determined: He would not trade on her past. And if by any chance she took him, he would never show her that he remembered that she had one.

After writing to Gratian he had spent the week before his holiday began, in an attempt to renew the youthfulness of his appearance, which made him feel older, leaner, bonier and browner than ever. He got up early, rode in the rain, took Turkish baths, and did all manner of exercises; neither smoked nor drank, and went to bed early, exactly as if he had been going to ride a steeplechase. On the afternoon, when at last he left on that terrific pilgrimage, he gazed at his face with a sort of despair, it was so lean, and leather-coloured, and he counted almost a dozen grey hairs.

When he reached the bungalow, and was told that she was working in the corn-fields, he had for the first time a feeling that Fate was on his side. Such a meeting would be easier than any other! He had been watching her for several minutes before she saw him, with his heart beating more violently than it had ever beaten in the trenches; and that new feeling of hope stayed with him all through the greeting, throughout supper, and even after

she had left them and gone upstairs. Then, with the suddenness of a blind drawn down, it vanished, and he sat on, trying to talk, and slowly getting more and more silent and restless.

"Nollie gets so tired, working," Gratian said. He knew she meant it kindly but that she should say it at all was ominous. He got up at last, having lost hope of seeing Noel again, conscious too that he had answered the last three questions at random.

In the porch George said: "You'll come in to lunch to-morrow, won't you?"

"Oh, thanks, I'm afraid it'll bore you all."

"Not a bit. Nollie won't be so tired."

Again—so well meant. They were very kind. He looked up from the gate, trying to make out which her window might be; but all was dark. A little way down the road he stopped to light a cigarette; and, leaning against a gate, drew the smoke of it deep into his lungs, trying to assuage the ache in his heart. So it was hopeless! She had taken the first, the very first chance, to get away from him! She knew that he loved her, could not help knowing, for he had never been able to keep it out of his eyes and voice. If she had felt ever so little for him, she would not have avoided him this first evening. 'I'll go back to that desert,' he thought; 'I'm not going to whine and crawl. I'll go back, and bite on it; one must have some pride. Oh, why the hell am I crocked-up like this? If only I could get out to France again!' And then Noel's figure bent over the falling corn formed before him. 'I'll have one more try,' he thought; 'one more—to-morrow somewhere, I'll get to know for certain. And if I get what Leila's got I shall deserve it, I suppose. Poor Leila! Where is she? Back at High Constantia?' What was that? A cry—of terror—in that wood! Crossing to the edge, he called "Coo-ee!" and stood peering into its darkness. He heard the sound of bushes being brushed aside, and whistled. A figure came bursting out, almost into his arms.

"Hallo!" he said; "what's up?"

A voice gasped: "Oh! It's—it's nothing!"

He saw Noel. She had swayed back, and stood about a yard away. He could dimly see her covering her face with her arms. Feeling instinctively that she wanted to hide her fright, he said quietly:

"What luck! I was just passing. It's awfully dark."

"I—I got lost; and a man—caught my foot, in there!"

Moved beyond control by the little gulps and gasps of her breathing, he stepped forward and put his hands on her shoulders. He held her lightly, without speaking, terrified lest he should wound her pride.

"I—I got in there," she gasped, "and the trees—and I stumbled over a man asleep, and he——"

"Yes, yes, I know," he murmured, as if to a child. She had dropped her arms now, and he could see her face, with eyes unnaturally dilated, and lips quivering. Then moved again beyond control, he drew her so close that he could feel the throbbing of her heart, and put his lips to her forehead all wet with heat. She closed her eyes, gave a little choke, and buried her face against his coat.

"There, there, my darling!" he kept on saying. "There, there, my darling!" He could feel the snuggling of her cheek against his shoulder. He had got her—had got her! He was somehow certain that she would not draw back now. And in the wonder and ecstasy of that thought, all the world above her head, the stars in their courses, the wood which had frightened her, seemed miracles of beauty and fitness. By such fortune as had never come to man, he had got her! And he murmured over and over again:

"I love you!" She was resting perfectly quiet against him, while her heart ceased gradually to beat so fast. He could feel her cheek rubbing against his coat of Harris tweed. Suddenly he sniffed at it, and whispered:

"It smells good."

VI

When summer sun has burned all Egypt, the white man looks eagerly each day for evening, whose rose-coloured veil melts opalescent into the dun drift of the hills, and iridescent above, into the slowly deepening blue. Pierson stood gazing at the mystery of the desert from under the little group of palms and bougainvillea which formed the garden of the hospital. Evensong was in full voice: From the far wing a gramophone was grinding out a music-hall ditty; two aeroplanes, wheeling exactly like the buzzards of the desert, were letting drip the faint whir of their flight; metallic voices drifted from the Arab village; the wheels of the water-wells creaked; and every now and then a dry rustle was stirred from the palm-leaves by puffs of desert wind. On either hand an old road ran out, whose line could be marked by the little old watch-towers of another age. For how many hundred years had human life passed along it to East and West; the brown men and their camels, threading that immemorial track over the desert, which ever filled him with wonder, so still it was, so wide, so desolate, and every evening so beautiful! He sometimes felt that he could sit for ever looking at it; as though its cruel mysterious loveliness were—home; and yet he never looked at it without a spasm of homesickness.

So far his new work had brought him no nearer to the hearts of men. Or at least he did not feel it had. Both at the regimental base, and now in this hospital—an intermediate stage—waiting for the draft with which he would be going into Palestine, all had been very nice to him, friendly, and as it were indulgent; so might schoolboys have treated some well-intentioned dreamy master, or business men a harmless idealistic inventor who came visiting their offices. He had even the feeling that they were glad to have him about, just as they were glad to have their mascots and their regimental colours; but of heart-to-heart simple comradeship—it seemed they neither wanted it of him nor expected him to give it, so that he had a feeling that he would be forward and impertinent to offer it. Moreover, he no longer knew how. He was very lonely. 'When I come face to face with death,' he would think, 'it will be different. Death makes us all brothers. I may be of real use to them then.'

They brought him a letter while he stood there listening to that even-song, gazing at the old desert road.

"East Bungalow.

"DARLING DAD,

"I do hope this will reach you before you move on to Palestine. You said in your last—at the end of September, so I hope you'll just get it. There is one great piece of news, which I'm afraid will hurt and trouble you; Nollie is married to Jimmy Fort. They were married down here this afternoon, and have just gone up to Town. They have to find a house of course. She has been very restless, lonely, and unhappy ever since you went, and I'm sure it is really for the best. She is quite another creature, and simply devoted, headlong. It's just like Nollie. She says she didn't know what she wanted, up to the last minute. But now she seems as if she could never want anything else.

"Dad dear, Nollie could never have made good by herself. It isn't her nature, and it's much better like this, I feel sure, and so does George. Of course it isn't ideal—and one wanted that for her; but she did break her wing, and he is so awfully good and devoted to her, though you didn't believe it, and perhaps won't, even now. The great thing is to feel her happy again, and know she's safe. Nollie is capable of great devotion; only she must be anchored. She was drifting all about; and one doesn't know what she might have done, in one of her moods. I do hope you won't grieve about it. She's dreadfully anxious about how you'll feel. I know it will be wretched for you, so far off; but do try and believe it's for the best. . . . She's out of danger; and she was really in a horrible position. It's so good for the baby, too, and only fair to him. I do think one must take things as they are, Dad dear. It was impossible to mend Nollie's wing. If she were a fighter, and gloried in it, or if she were the sort who would 'take the veil'—but she isn't either. So it *is* all right, Dad. She's writing to you herself. I'm sure Leila didn't want Jimmy Fort to be unhappy because he couldn't love her; or she would never have gone away. George sends you his love; we are both very well. And Nollie is looking splendid still, after her harvest work. All, all my love, Dad dear. Is there anything we can get, and send you? Do take care of your blessed self, and don't grieve about Nollie.

"GRATIAN."

A half-sheet of paper fluttered down; he picked it up from among the parched fibre of dead palm-leaves.

"DADDY DARLING,
"I've done it. Forgive me—I'm so happy.
"YOUR NOLLIE."

The desert shimmered, the palm-leaves rustled, and Pierson stood trying to master the emotion roused in him by those two letters. He felt no anger, not even vexation; he felt no sorrow, but a loneliness so utter and complete that he did not know how to bear it. It seemed as if some last link with life had snapped. 'My girls are happy,' he thought. 'If I am not—what does it matter? If my faith and my convictions mean nothing to them—why should they follow? I must and will not feel lonely. I ought to have the sense of God present, to feel His hand in mine. If I cannot, what use am I—what use to the poor fellows in there, what use in all the world?'

An old native on a donkey went by, piping a Soudanese melody on a little wooden Arab flute. Pierson turned back into the hospital humming it. A nurse met him there.

"The poor boy at the end of A ward is sinking fast, sir; I expect he'd like to see you."

He went into A ward, and walked down between the beds to the west window end, where two screens had been put, to block off the cot. Another nurse, who was sitting beside it, rose at once.

"He's quite conscious," she whispered; "he can still speak a little. He's such a dear." A tear rolled down her cheek, and she passed out behind the screens. Pierson looked down at the boy; perhaps he was twenty, but the unshaven down on his cheeks was soft and almost colourless. His eyes were closed. He breathed regularly, and did not seem in pain; but there was about him that which told he was going; something resigned, already of the grave. The window was wide open, covered by mosquito-netting, and a tiny line of sunlight, slanting through across the foot of the cot, crept slowly backwards over the sheets and the boy's body, shortening as it crept. In the grey whiteness of the walls, the bed, the boy's face, just that pale yellow bar of sunlight, and one splash of red and blue from a little flag

on the wall glowed out. At this cooler hour, the ward behind the screens was almost empty, and few sounds broke the stillness; but from without came that intermittent rustle of dry palm-leaves. Pierson waited in silence, watching the sun sink. If the boy might pass like this, it would be God's mercy. Then he saw the boy's eyes open, wonderfully clear eyes of the lighted grey which has dark rims; his lips moved, and Pierson bent down to hear.

"I'm goin' West, zurr." The whisper had a little soft burr; the lips quivered; a pucker as of a child formed on his face, and passed.

Through Pierson's mind there flashed the thought: 'O God! Let me be of some help to him!'

"To God, my dear son!" he said.

A flicker of humour, of ironic question, passed over the boy's lips.

Terribly moved, Pierson knelt down, and began softly, fervently praying. His whispering mingled with the rustle of the palm-leaves, while the bar of sunlight crept up the body. In the boy's smile had been the whole of stoic doubt, of stoic acquiescence. It had met him with an unconscious challenge; had seemed to know so much. Pierson took his hand, which lay outside the sheet. The boy's lips moved, as though in thanks; he drew a long feeble breath, as if to suck in the thread of sunlight; and his eyes closed. Pierson bent over the hand. When he looked up the boy was dead. He kissed his forehead and went quietly out.

The sun had set, and he walked away from the hospital to a hillock beyond the track on the desert's edge, and stood looking at the afterglow. The sun and the boy—together they had gone West, into that wide glowing nothingness.

The muezzin call to sunset prayer in the Arab village came to him clear and sharp, while he sat there, unutterably lonely. Why had that smile so moved him? Other death smiles had been like this evening smile on the desert hills—a glowing peace, a promise of heaven. But the boy's smile had said: 'Waste no breath on me—you cannot help. Who knows—who knows? I have no hope, no faith; but I am adventuring. Good-bye!' Poor boy! He had braved all things, and moved out uncertain, yet undaunted! Was that, then, the uttermost truth, was faith a smaller thing? But from that strange notion he recoiled with horror. 'In faith I have lived, in faith I will

die!' he thought, 'God helping me!' And the breeze, ruffling the desert sand, blew the grains against the palms of his hands, outstretched above the warm earth.

1917-18.